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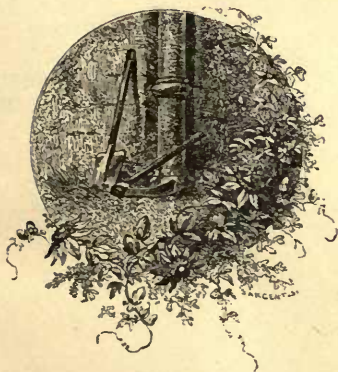


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CLOVERLY.

BY

MARY R. HIGHAM.



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TO
MY DEAR FRIEND "GEORGIE,"

WITH A TENDER MEMORY OF

"LANG SYNE,"

AND A REGRET THAT IN THESE LATER YEARS I CAN
OFFER HER NOTHING BUT THIS SIMPLE
LITTLE CHRONICLE,

WITH THE

OLD-TIME LOVE.

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CLOVERLY.

CHAPTER I.

CASTLE BUILDING.

I am to be the family historian. Mother says so, and certainly mother knows best. As for the matter in hand, *nous verrons*—for, now that I am left to myself, I begin to doubt my own powers, as with pen in hand and a fair ream of paper piled before me on the table, I poise my weapon said to be mightier than the sword, over it and hesitate how to begin. I suppose one must settle upon the plan of a story before one writes it, just as Miss Prissy, when she cuts out my polonaise, says with a flourish of her scissors, ‘Looped or plain in the back, Miss? Open in front or buttoned?’ Yes, I must have a plot and a plan, just as she has when she lays down her papers. Let me see, what will it be? The worst of it is nothing ever happens—everything goes along in a certain groove—life in the country repeats itself every day in the year. Father says it is a poem, but dearie me! the family chronicle is to be done up in prose, and very dull, cold prose, I fear, too; but if there is poetry in it, why can’t I find it out?

Let me see: first of all, the name of my story—Cloverly, or Cloverly Chronicles? No, I think just Cloverly; because if I say Chronicles, I must feel that I have chronicled something; and there is so very, very little to say.

But Cloverly is another matter. Why, I can just run riot all over the farm ; and when I come to think, there is poetry in it. Why, the month of June is a very poem in itself, and down here in dear old Jersey, which I once thought ever and ever so far out of the Union, but now—well, I have changed my mind, that is all ; used my womanly privilege, and above all things like to see the N. J. under my grand blue and gold monogram. All my note and letter paper is stamped thus,—we girls think it quite stunning. In its way I've no doubt it is, only everybody has initialled and monogrammed paper now-a-days, and those who have it, a crest,—sometimes those who don't own it. We haven't a crest ; I wanted one when I came home from boarding school, but father laughed and said 'No !' if he had one it would have to be a shovel and spade, for everybody that ever belonged to him had been a farmer—bah ! I wouldn't marry a farmer ! I've never said anything about the crest since.

But where to begin my chronicle. I must really think about that now. Perhaps it would be as well to go back to the night when father came home and broached the subject of this very Cloverly. Weary and anxious, I know, for those were the days when he tried to be a city man, and couldn't for the life of him get along with it. Those too were the days when his face showed real anxiety. We were at dinner, for like other city people we dined at six, and although the meal was a slender one, it was dinner for all that. I remember just how we looked, for if a thunderbolt had fallen in our midst and demolished us at one fell stroke, we could not have been more astonished. Father was carving carefully the one big chicken which Bess (the baby sister) was wistfully regarding in the light of a turkey, waiting with ill dis-

guised impatience to see how much would fall to her share. As he sliced the white meat he looked up at mother and said, 'Nelly, don't you want to go in the country to live?'

'Anywhere you please, Jem.'

And then the Jem thus addressed carved a little longer, helped the six children, who were swallowing every word as eagerly as they did the chicken, before he said

'Are you sure, Nelly, you wouldn't feel badly to leave the city?'

'I don't care where I go, Jem,' said mother, again; 'anywhere in the world with you, if it is to the North Pole, so that the lines fade out of your face, and you look like yourself again.'

Father gave her a quick, grateful look, this time. (He was always making love to mother, in a furtive kind of way, as if it wasn't quite the thing for staid people who had been married five and twenty years; but we children thought it was just beautiful, though we never dared say a word about it.) 'What do the children say, then?' he asked.

We all spoke at once. That is a family failing,—not belonging to ours alone, either. Everybody does it. What a hubbub there must have been in the Ark, when Noah debated the question of walking out on dry land! Nat thinks he ought to be heard first, because he is the oldest boy; and Meg thinks it would be more polite if the young lady of the family were allowed to have her say; and baby Bess, because she is the youngest, thinks she ought to sit on a throne, and a coronation robe and sceptre would be none too good for her, with the whole family bowing around—and they generally do; but oh! these middle children! the three that come in between

Nat and Meg and Bess ! We always say among ourselves, who would be a *middle child* ?—for all the good things of this life are absorbed by the oldest and youngest. Nat was the only baby in our family that ever attained to the honor of gold armlets, and cut his first tooth upon pink coral with silver bells. And then Meg with her blue eyes and dainty smiles ! why, Meg, the first daughter—that was another unheard of child ! The marvellous things that Meg said and did, are told to this day—told gravely, and what is more, they are believed. Then came Flo and Bob ; and then, when children were no longer a rarity or a marvel, I had to make my appearance in this unfeeling world, a mere common-place child, without beauty, without eclat, and, alas ! without coral and bells or bracelets.

Nevertheless I survived ; under the unfortunate circumstances it seems a little strange, and just when I had begun to feel that I was to be the pet and baby of the household band, Bess made her entree, and from that day forward I ceased to be anything remarkable, falling back at once into the common place, middle position, which Flo and Bob had submitted to with the utmost good nature.

Perhaps it is just as well to insert here, that I never submit to anything with good nature. I make it a point to bristle with opinions—as many, both offensive and defensive, as quills upon a porcupine. I want to know the reasons,—the whys and wherefores,—and then I dearly love to give my opinion,—give it, I say, because it is never asked. But this one night of which I write, instead of hearing us collectively, father waited until the little uproar had subsided, and then asked us individually what we thought of going into the country. Nat lik-

ed it, and Meg liked it, and the other children liked it, chiming in with ready acquiescence, only longing for a change of some sort ; but I didn't care to submit so coolly.

'Leave the city !' I echoed with a dreary sigh when it came my turn to speak. 'Why, father, you *know* I won't like it ! I'm afraid of cows, and I'm afraid of snakes ; it's lonely, of course—no pavements to walk on, no shop windows to peer into ; for if one can't buy, the next best thing is to look. And then the pictures ! how *can* I leave my painting just when I'm getting along so well,—the only pleasant thing in my whole life, (at this there was just the faintest ripple of a family smile,) just to go to a stupid, old country, where there is nothing to see or hear,—no society, no walks ; and we won't have a carriage for drives,—nothing but an awful old farm, cows and snakes, and everything dreadful !'

Of course there was a shout, the family ripple generally breaking out into a smile that could be *heard*. Father said gravely 'he hoped to raise something better than a crop of boa constrictors'; mother laughed pleasantly, and finished the thing up with 'We'll call it all settled, Jem ; buy your farm, and we'll go as soon as you please.'

'Why, Nelly,' and father leaned back in his chair comfortably, 'you see we can have the farm to-morrow, if we choose to go there. It is Uncle Janeway's place. He has been renting it to some city people for a year or more,—they've bought somewhere near, and now the farm is on his hands again. It will come very cheap to us : we can pay by instalments, just about as we're paying for our rent here. We can go any minute we like.'

'Let's start to-morrow,' said Meg, waving her napkin for a banner. 'Where's the place ?'

'Down in New Jersey; right by the sea.'

There was a family shout again. This time it was a dispiriting cry, and mother said, with a little shiver, covering up her ears, 'Don't whoop like Modocs, children.' And we all replied with a well modulated groan 'But New Jersey! who wants to go there?' Nat grumbled 'Out of the world,—way down to the jumping-off place'; and Meg inquired facetiously 'if we were going to search for Sir John Franklin's remains.'

'We're going to search for a nice little home,' said mother; 'and we are going to see father rid of the cares that have been killing him of late. It's all settled, Jem; we'll go, and be very happy too.'

That is the way mother does everything. It doesn't take her over five minutes to make up her mind about anything, and then, though she is so small and has such soft blue eyes and gentle ways, she goes to work with the will and energy of an Amazon. There never was such a contradiction of a woman, and she manages father like a book! He likes it, too—that is the queer part of it—married people are so strange! and then we children like it of course—why not? To my little chronicle, I may say it, was there ever, ever such a mother!

Of course we knew it was all settled when she smiled upon father that night at the dinner table, and said 'Anywhere, Jem, in the world with you.' I suppose it is the better way; but if I were poor, and had six dreadful children all talking at once, and each one thinking his or her opinion worth double its weight in solid gold, I am morally certain I should enact the part of the old woman in her shoe. What a mercy that I am father's daughter instead of his wife! I made that very same re-

mark to Meg, that night, when we went up stairs to bed, just as I was standing with my hand upon the gas, ready to turn it off.

‘Stop a minute, Bab,’ she answered; ‘don’t put out the light yet. I want to look at you a minute.’

Meg always said ‘*Put out the light,*’ just as if it were a candle, instead of gas. Meg had been born and brought up in the country, and she never could get used to city things, she said.

‘Why, what’s the matter with me?’ I asked, lingering as she had bidden me. ‘Don’t I look all right?’

‘All right, of course, old Bab, only you’re in your tragedy queen robes to-night,—your nose goes right up, just as if you were ready to sniff disapproval at the whole world; your eyes are as bright as stars, and your cheeks are crimson,—it’s my belief, Bab, you’ll write a book one of these days.’

‘I mean to paint a picture,’ I answered. ‘If that’s all you want to say, you can say it in the dark,’ and I turned off the gas; ‘it don’t pay to stand up here with cold feet, only to be told that I look like a tragedy queen or a literary woman. I detest the whole lot!’

Now Meg and I never agreed, but we never quarrelled. She was steady, and I was flighty, and our perfect incompatibility of taste and temper formed the strongest bond of sympathy between us. As I cuddled up in her arms, after this not very tender speech of mine, I asked ‘What makes you think I’ll write a book, Meggie? You know I don’t know enough to do it.’

‘O! it would be fun to read it, if you only could write it in one of your blazing moods, just as you are to-night, about going into the country. Call it “Six Acres Enough.”’

'Or sixty acres too much,' I laughed. 'Good night, old castle-builder. I've *snuffed out your candle*. Shut up your eyes and go to sleep.'

In two weeks more we did snuff our candles out down on the Janeway farm, and Meg liked it ever so much better than gas.



CHAPTER II.

WE VIEW OUR POSSESSIONS.

Yes, without a doubt, Meg liked the Janeway Farm,—but then Meg would have liked Kamtchatka or Hindoostan, the North Pole or the Torrid Zone. The slight difference of heat and cold was of no consequence, it being Summer and sunshine in her calendar all the year round. If there were any pleasant little halting spots, or resting places, in this world, Meg was the one to find it,—not find it just to enjoy selfishly, but she would call all the family in, and as many outsiders as she could, to share it with her. Such people manage to gather up all that there is of existence, and never waste a crumb or an atom of it. It is a good way. There are so many sorrows that must come, that it is just as well to make the most of every little joy. Mother says there is so much that could be turned into joys, if we only had a mind; things that nobody thinks of, or takes any notice of, until they are all gone, and then they go back and say ‘those good old times,’—but when the times were young, they didn’t think much about it. They were always looking forward, to something better, I suppose.

I remember when we were little bits of children, how we cried if it rained and spoiled an anticipated pleasure, and I remember, too, how gallantly Meg always came to the rescue with her refreshing facts, ‘It can’t rain forever, girls, that’s one good thing. Don’t waste your time crying. There’s a piece of blue sky already,’ and off we’d go to hunt it up. That’s the charm of such natures. They take just whatever is laid upon them, and they are always on the lookout for a bit of blue sky, aye, and they find it generally. Meg always found hers. She found

it that first day of our leaving home, when all was dreary and desolate as it could be. I could think of nothing but a party of melancholy ghosts as we stalked through the dismantled house for the last time, putting finishing strokes to the packing cases and trunks, and picking up stray things here and there ; but Meg acted as if it were a picnic. She and Bob kept up the spirits of the family. But to me it seemed strange and sad to look out upon the busy streets, and think that we would not be missed at all, that people would hurry by and never notice the closed shutters, or miss the young faces that used to cluster at the windows,—perhaps the house would be let, and there would be as much of life and busy planning as when we were there, and no blank felt by any one, except indeed my old artist friend, who gave me lessons, almost *con amore*,—for his pay was a mere pretence. There was real sorrow in his bleared old eyes when he bade me good-bye, telling me I would be ‘one great artist’ when he saw me again, and in my eyes there was no doubt about the tears. How could I ever fulfil my destiny, if I took my one only talent and buried it in the wilderness? And this good-bye, how I did hate to say it? Good-bye—a little word, and so quickly spoken, but the depth and the meaning of it, one never quite understands until it is all over with. It is a hard word to say to friends,—it gave me a heart ache to say it to the old house. I wonder if any one will have any sympathy with me? A dull, uninteresting pile of brick in a dingy, narrow street, certainly unfashionable, cheerless, and hopelessly plain,—but it was home.

But the agonies, whatever they were, were soon over, and in one short week I had said good-bye to everything and everybody as completely as if I were about to enter a

cloister for life. It was May, and May is not a favorable time to view a country farm for the first time. It is a month only fit to write about and read of in poetry books. It is not intended for enjoyment, but sentiment, and is as freaky and coquettish as a woman. Nevertheless we accomplished our flitting on the first day of May, with only Bob for escort, as father and Nat had gone down to the place fully a month before. It was a great event in our lives, this turning our backs on the city forever, although it was only a distance of thirty odd miles. We girls wore travelling dresses of soft gray serge, with round hats and drab veils—a good, serviceable color for the country; and it was to be my church dress, I very well knew, at least until the Summer came, when I could don my light muslins.

We all carried something in our hands, to be ‘useful as well as ornamental,’ Meg laughingly observed. I took my sketch-book and color-box, in a frantic endeavor to make it look as artistic an expedition as possible; but Bess nipped my little aspirations in the bud, by carrying Miss Sniffins, our old tortoise-shell cat, in a basket large enough to make it a debatable point whether she were bearing the family luncheon, or the family linen. If there were any doubts on the subject, Miss Sniffins settled it by a series of pitiful howls, and a violent scratching every time the car jolted or the boat lurched; for we travelled by boat first, and rail afterward, and Bess and her ‘spry basket,’ as Bob called it, proved an insufferable nuisance. In spite of this, and one or two minor afflictions, the trip was a pleasant one, and there was still a little sunshine, although the day was nearly ended when the cars stopped at a small station, and the brakeman shouted out the name of our future home. We

all smiled, and rushed out of the car delightedly, and while Bob bustled away with our checks, we stood on the platform and took a good view around.

‘Do look! What are we coming to? Here’s our blessed old Nat with a thing that looks like Noah’s Ark and a great bay horse. Is that our perambulator, Nat?’ I cried as he jumped down from the ancient vehicle and held both arms open to toss mother in, and give her a kiss at the same time.

And then, how we talked! First one, then the other, sometimes all at once, huddled together on the old-fashioned seats, satchels, shawls, and bags tucked in, and Bessie’s basket hoisted up on our laps, and yet I believe there was room for more in that dreadful old thing—for I wouldn’t call it a carriage. I am sure it would have answered very well in Utah, for one of the Latter-day Saints to take an airing with his family, but for us it was simply dreadful. Nat was in great spirits about it, however. ‘Wasn’t it good of dear old Uncle Janeway,’ he said, ‘to leave us this comfortable carriage? We can all go riding around the country together. I am sure by a little crowding we can all get in.’

Meg shouted, but I answered very tartly, ‘You can count me out, Nat. It isn’t at all likely that I shall ever take another ride in the vile thing. I’m sure Uncle Janeway left it as a satire. He wanted to make us look like a caravan.’

Nat looked amazed, and mother said gently it was very nice, and she was sure she would enjoy it; and then we talked of our exodus, our trip down, and our impressions as we went along, Nat trying to put the history of the past month in five minutes, for it did not seem more than a five minutes ride from the depot to the farm lane,

down which the old *shay* rattled at a break-neck speed; and there was father standing on the porch with both arms wide open, and the new maid of all work peeping at us from behind a shutter. I don't remember ever seeing father with such a smiling face; and the look of care, that I had seen so long that I did not realize it was care, was all gone. He looked more than happy; he looked younger by ten years than when I saw him last, and I knew mother thought so too, for I heard her say, as she put her hand on his shoulder,

'It's old times back again, Jem. I'm more than satisfied.'

It gave me a light heart to hear her say that, though I was still steadfastly bent upon being a martyr, if I could possibly accomplish it.

'Let's go all over the house, and see everything that is to be seen, before dark,' proposed Meg.

'Yes, and choose our rooms,' said Flo. 'I suppose you and Barbara will sleep together, just as you used in the city?'

It was odd that Meg took me, and not Flo, for Flo was nearly five years older than I, but so it was. She said that I *needed* Meg to keep me straight. Perhaps that was it, and then Bess needed Flo,—at any rate we were all content, and rushed up stairs to examine the rooms; father calling out that the two over the dining-room were the ones he and Nat had selected for us, and into which some of our furniture had been placed.

They were cosy rooms, one opening into the other, and two windows in each, facing the orchard and the meadows beyond, though it was so dark we could see very little. But the windows were all open, and the air drifted in, soft and moist, with the warmth of Spring, like a tender

promise of the sweetness and beauty yet to be, when the Summer was fulfilled. I just stood still and clapped my hands like a child, while Flo said in her serene, calm way,

‘It is so peaceful and still, I feel as if life were going to be all made up of beautiful, long Sundays. We shall be so happy, I know, here.’

‘And when the furniture is in the rooms, how large and comfortable they will be,’ said practical Meg. ‘And these big closets—we shall lose our wardrobes in them, I’m afraid. Isn’t it splendid, Bab?’

‘Yes,’ I said guardedly, not willing to show too much enthusiasm at first, ‘but no hot and cold water, and no bath.’

‘O! an immense one—the whole sea—only think of that!’ and Meg laughed comfortably again. ‘I am glad the carpets are down and bedsteads up; to-morrow we can do the beautifying—but now let’s go on all over, and use up every scrap of daylight in seeing.’

‘Up stairs and down stairs, and in my lady’s chamber,’ we trooped, laughing, inspecting, and making our plans as we went along.

I wonder if any one would think me stupid or tiresome if I described the house? I hope not, for it is so pleasant to record just how it all looked to our inexperienced, city eyes. It would be like taking a beautiful picture out and leaving only the frame, to write a chronicle of our doings at Cloverly, and not tell about Cloverly itself. And yet it was just an old-fashioned, low-ceiled, farmhouse, with a broad porch, and a wing on each side, like two arms spread out in welcome. At least it always seemed so to me, for I never looked at the dear old place but it brought father before me with his arms stretched out to us that first night of our coming home, and the

picture remained so printed on my memory, that ever after the two comfortable wings seemed like an embrace. There was a broad hall in the centre, with two square rooms on each side, a dining-room and a kitchen running back, and something built on, off the dining-room, like a box, or an afterthought, and which, years ago, might have served rheumatic Uncle Janeway for a bed-room, but which the city people had changed into a library. There were the shelves all around the three sides of the room, a prim, wooden mantel, with an open grate, and one broad window looking out, so father said, over the lawn and up the lane: when company was coming we could see them a long way off if we were by this window; and Bess climbed upon the broad recessed seat, and suggested it as a good cuddling place for Miss Sniffens. It seemed an immense house to us, and so old-fashioned and beautiful, with the dark oak wainscotings, and the waxed floors in hall and dining-room. How perfect we girls could make it with the very nice furniture we had brought down from the city. It never seemed anything very fine when we were there, although mother prized it. It was a gift from her father when she married, but such things seemed old-fashioned to us then, whereas now it would be in perfect keeping with the house. We longed to begin. Meg and I could do the 'heavy respectable,' and Flo could come after with the dainty, finishing up touches, for Flo was the true artist of the family, though I was the only one that painted.

Flo was just like mother, only she was tall instead of short, but she had mother's quiet ways, and her low voice and little refinements of manner, that not one of the rest of us had ever taken up as an inheritance. Nat was more like her; but Nat was a man—that is, in years, though he

always was a child to us, and a baby in arms to his mother. He was always bringing something to her when he came home at night, if it was only a caress, and their whispered confidences were never at an end. That first night he brought in a branch of white blossoms—arbutus I think they call it—and twisted it about her plate. He leaned over and kissed her forehead as he did so, saying something about the first flowers of the season, and mother's eyes were full of light and love as she looked up at him—her great tall son. How proud she was of him, and how proud he was of her! I never understood the full grace of motherhood until I saw Nat and his mother together. Now Bob never does anything like that. He would as soon present mother with a cabbage as a flower, and I don't know but sooner, for Bob is immensely practical, and might have an eye on the next day's dinner. I have a great sympathy for Bob. I fancy we are alike in many things. He came in late while we were at our supper; for after he had taken care of our trunks, he went swinging around the farm at a great rate, and in one hour had seen all that it was possible to see in the fading light, very much as we had been doing in the house, but seeing it all with different eyes from Nat's. He had passed by yards and yards of the feathery white blossoms that twisted and twined among the tender green in the woods about the house, and never saw it, or the blue violets that were studding the short grass, or the slender bell flowers waving in the crevices of the rocks. He dashed about, taking a view here, and a good look there, coming in just about the time that Nat did with his little nosegay for mother.

'All serene, mother,' he shouted, as he knocked the mud and red clay from his boots, tossed off his cap, and

wheeled into place at table. 'A jolly old farm—no end of pictures for Bab to paint. I'll take you where you can "see the sea," to-morrow—worlds of woods,' he went on, with a wave of his bread and butter, by way of illustration; 'and, O Bess, I saw lots of birds' nests—eggs in them, too; it just does a fellow good to take a breath. I whooped and hurrahed, and whistled and danced, and not a soul heard me.'

'I did,' said Bess. 'Meggie said it was a cat-bird, but I knew it was my Robin.'

Bob patted her cheek and rumbled up her curly hair, with a hearty laugh. 'I'll take you out to-morrow, missy, and let you see real cat-birds and robins. It makes a fellow awful hungry, though. I could eat everything there is on the table without giving the rest of you a ghost of a chance. Hallo, mother, where did you get your flowers?'

'Nat brought them to me from the woods, I believe.'

'From the woods? You don't say so! Why I didn't see them; if I had, I'd have brought you some too.'

We all laughed, first at that, and then at the poor boy's appetite, and then at our nondescript meal, which was dinner and tea combined, but which threatened to be barely sufficient for Bob's needs; and then we had a great deal of merriment at father's expense, who, man like, had brought all the china into use that should have been put away, and put that away which we considered quite indispensable. Altogether it was a sort of harlequin entertainment, and when it was ended, we gathered together in one of the great empty rooms, where Nat, with much forethought, had kindled a little fire upon the hearth, 'more for cheerfulness than warmth,' he explained, although the night seemed a little chilly.

There we were, eight of us, all together again, and but for the surroundings, we might have imagined ourselves back in the city. Father put one arm softly across the back of mother's chair, and together they reviewed things in a half whisper, while Nat occasionally put in a word. I took a stool and got as near to mother as I could, with a feeling that father and Nat were going to absorb her. It was true they had not seen her in a whole month, but I was always a little jealous of my tall brother ; so I sat as close to her as possible, with the folds of her soft gray gown lying over my dress, and my hand sometimes stealing into hers. Meg and Bob were chatting about the woods, the sea, and the farm, Flo quietly putting in a word now and then, and Bess talking volubly to Miss Sniffins, who looked frightened enough after her long confinement in the basket. Mother's eyes ran along the row gathered about the fire, and I think she felt perfectly satisfied ; and Nat said with a restful expression :

'The last two weeks were a trifle lonely, I can tell you. It begins to look homelike, to-night.'

'O by Saturday you'll never know we've moved,' said Bob with an energy that was equal to every occasion. 'Why I'm going to put in to-morrow and work like a Hercules. I don't think Hercules ever did much to boast of in the way of work, though. Suppose I try to work like Bob Fox ?'

And now I might just as well set it down here—sooner or later it must come out—that is, if I make this a strictly truthful chronicle ; but I do so dread to put disagreeable things down in black and white. Father and mother and all the rest, even to Flo, are not a bit ashamed of it, and why should I be ? But Fox is such a mean little name, and Barbara Fox—it is just horrible ! Bob don't

think of it in that light, and I believe actually rejoices in his title of Bob Fox. Flo never calls him that, however. She and Bess say Robin or Robbie ; and Flo also never calls me anything but Barbara ; but it don't help matters much—I'm just Barbara Fox or Bab Fox. I wonder if I shall ever marry, and if it will be for love or gratitude ! I am certain of one thing : I could never refuse a man with a fine name ! The girls tease me almost out of my senses about it. Bob says if I don't like Bab, I can change it to sly—sly Fox ; but Flo said in her dreamy way that I must take care ; it 'is the little foxes that spoil the vines' ; though I think she meant it more to show how little follies, like my vanity about names, for instance, spoils the best minds.

I wish I were good and religious, like Flo ; for I am sure it must be her religion that makes her so serene and happy. If I were like her, then I shouldn't mind such a trifling thing as a name, and I wouldn't mind our poverty, and our little economies and makeshifts wouldn't fret me as they do now. She takes these things quietly, calling them duties, and loving them just because they are duties, and that is the one thing that I cannot comprehend about her religion. She looks at everything from a certain elevation, and I never could, if I lived to be as old as Methuselah, attain to her sublime heights. Indeed, I cannot understand it even. But there is one thing I am sure of,—she is infinitely my superior in everything, and because she is just so far above and beyond me, there is a feeling of shame in my heart when I write it down here, that one of my greatest trials is—not my lack of religion—but simply that my name is Barbara—Bab Fox !

CHAPTER III.

SETTLING OURSELVES.

The next morning when we woke, tired and dazed, peering about us in a sort of half dream, forgetful for the moment where we were, the first sound that we heard was the plash and trickle of the rain against the window glass. Father said that it was a fortunate thing for him that we had taken such a pleasant day for our home-coming, for the south wind that we had thought so lovely and Summer-like, was sure to bring up clouds—and he had proved a true prophet.

Meg said 'Lovely!' the first thing when she woke up. 'Perfectly charming! We couldn't ask for anything better than rain, until we get settled. Come, girls, rouse yourselves, and let's buckle on our armor.'

I ran to the window, guiltless of curtain or shade, and tried to get a glimpse of things without.

'Sister Annie, what do you see?' called Flo in her even staccato; and Bess slipped out of bed and looked out of the window, with a disappointed 'O!' rubbing her eyes to be sure that she was not dreaming.

'It looks very vague,' I answered; 'almost as much so as it did when we were in the city, and tried to imagine it to ourselves. Rivers of waters! Of course we know there is a sea beyond, or perhaps it's a tidal wave creeping up to our very door. Ugh! It all looks watery enough. Well, as Meg says, we can unpack our trunks and boxes, and begin to set up our regular home life again.'

‘I shall rather enjoy the rain,’ and Flo proceeded placidly to dress.

‘It will be too wet for Miss Sniffins to want to run away,’ supplemented Bess. ‘I’m glad it rains, too. She’ll be all at home and happy when the sun comes out again.’

‘Catch Miss Sniffins to run away,’ said Meg. ‘She knows a good home when she’s in it. Did you butter her paws, little woman?’

‘Put butter on her paws, Meggie?’ asked Bess doubtfully. ‘Why no; it wouldn’t be nice.’

‘But that is an important ceremony. She’d never run away after that. She’d lick her paws and lie down on the hearth, a contented cat for the rest of her life.’

‘O would she, though?’ and Bess slipped on her things quickly, and ran down to anoint the cat, while we girls dressed more slowly, peered out of one window, then another, chatted a good deal, and made our plans.

‘Last night was camping out,’ said Meg. ‘Now I propose, Bab, that we take this room, and Flo and Bess can have the one adjoining. The doors can stand open between the rooms, and it will be so pleasant. Let’s make them real lovely. We can have pink *frivolities* on our mantel and bureau, and Flo can have blue.’

‘But the parlors—oughtn’t we to do those first?’ I suggested.

Meg swept me a courtesy. ‘Do hear how magnificent she has grown,’ she laughed. ‘I, for one, will be thankful to use the singular instead of plural. I don’t believe there is a room in the house that we can style a drawing-room or a parlor; do you, Flo?’

‘That was a pretty room where we sat last night,’ returned Flo.

‘What, with that old-fashioned chimney-place?’ I retorted. ‘It looked like a cavern.’

‘I thought it lovely,’ said Flo with undisturbed serenity. ‘We can’t expect a marble mantel and a soft coal fire. There’s an appropriateness in everything, Barbara dear; and now that we are in the country, we must not expect city things.’

‘We had little enough, then,’ I echoed dolefully.

‘You are determined to be a martyr; so just go ahead boldly, and fulfil your destiny, Bab,’ said Meg. ‘I’m going to find my strip of blue sky and sunshine indoors to-day, since it will rain. Come, let’s go down and explore.’

She and I linked arms and went down stairs, leaving Flo to sit alone by the window and read her little Bible—‘just a few verses before breakfast time, to set her right for the day,’ she said; but we thought she was always ‘set right,’ never neglecting a duty, and doing it as she did everything else, quietly and serenely. That was Flo’s charm. She bent her head seriously over her little book, turning the leaves to find her lesson for the day. Meg and I were content to hear it at prayers, morning and evening; but it was not enough for Flo, and we always gave her this little time to herself as a matter of course.

‘How good Flo is,’ Meg said, as she closed the door softly. ‘To think that she wouldn’t neglect her reading, our first day here, and we are all excitement and hurly-burly. We ought to try and be more like her.’

‘Good? Of course—our family saint; there never are two in any family, though you and Nat might slip in edgewise, as it were; but I never can be one, Meg; you’re all sunshine, and Flo is all peace; there must be a clap

of thunder and a little lightning occasionally, just to purify this Summer air, you know ; and I'll make as good a whirlwind as anybody.'

'Don't grumble, Bab, and put on that injured air ; brighten up a little for mother's sake, this morning. It is gloomy enough with the rain, and everything strange, and all the unpacking and putting to rights before her.'

'But we are going to help.'

'Yes, my queen ; we'll be the hands and feet, the machinery, if your royal highness will condescend, and mother will be the head that plans for us, and sets us going.'

'The motive power,' I added snappishly. 'You never get things by their right names,' and I went on to the dining-room, where breakfast was already laid, and where, to say the least, it looked as if the storm had been busy whisking things on instead of laying them symmetrically and properly. I knew Flo's sense of the fitness of things would be outraged, for even I was disgusted, and I began a hasty straightening out of knives, forks, and plates, for which I felt justified in wearing an injured frown, refusing to be agreeable to any one during the meal.

After prayers, father and Nat put on oilskin coats and went to the barn, though very little could be done in such a soaking rain.

'Bob can help you unpack and do the heavy work ; can't you, my son ?' said father, turning to him, and Bob gave a reluctant 'Yes.' He wanted to put on his boots, and take an umbrella and a vacation ; but he was much too good-natured to let his disappointment be seen in his face. Meg was smiling, of course—provokingly so. She had been peering around into the empty rooms, looking for her strip of blue sky—in the coal cellar most

likely; at all events, she had found it. Flo's little lesson had put her straight for the day, if indeed she had needed 'straightening'; but Bess and I were the two afflicted members of the family. Miss Sniffins had resented the anointing, which Bess had accomplished with Nat's hair oil in lieu of butter, as she felt a little shy of the new girl and the kitchen pantry; and now she had been crying over two or three long scratches that the indignant young woman in tortoise-shell habiliments had bestowed upon her pink cheek. Mother's quiet ways and steady temper brought us all out in good humor finally, and before the morning was half done we were all in the best of spirits.

Mother was the head; she did the planning, and we executed her bidding. Flo went after, and put the dainty finishing-up touches to everything. It rained the whole live-long day, and the next, and the next, until we looked upon it as a fixed fact. And while it rained we worked, and after we had fairly gotten into 'the swing of the thing,' as Bob called it, every hour made it seem more like home. The furniture that in the city amounted to so little, was in thorough good taste here. And the parlor, with the cavernous chimney that I had thought so ugly, was quite perfect when, on the third day, the sun consented to peep in and glorify everything. We had one or two really fine pictures beside those that I had painted, and which my old teacher declared were a credit to me, and we had plenty of the right kind of books, for father and mother both had taste in that direction, and if they had ever committed an extravagance or an indiscretion, it was in picking up occasionally a good thing in art and literature. Up-stairs it was unexceptionable. Flo had made bowers of our rooms with her dainty fin-

gers, and her cheap little bewilderments of blue and pink drapery, with white muslin and lace frillings.

We wore our old dresses, we sang our very blithest songs ; we threw up our windows when the storm was over, and let in all the sweet, moist air, with the singing of birds, and the perfume of drifting apple and peach blooms, and we could at last get a good clear view across the country, dewy and sparkling in the morning sun. What long breaths we took, and how we wanted to walk over to the cliff, beyond which we could see the blue arc of the sea, and the white sails coming and going. We worked fast, for so many hands made it seem almost like play, and in a week's time we were all through. We had been very happy and light-hearted about it. If I started a tune up in the garret, Meg would join in, and Flo would take it up in the parlor, and mother would hum it softly to herself as she vibrated between the kitchen and dining-room, and Nat and Bob would whistle in a chorus, as they busied themselves in the barn, or out on the lawn in front of the house, where a wonderful coleus bed was in progress, and a croquet ground being rolled and put into shape.

The farmer who had always managed the farm for Uncle Janeway, was still in charge. His white house looked very neat and pretty, half hidden by trees at the end of the lane, and under his direction Nat was intending to come out a first-class farmer. Bob was, as yet, in embryo, as far as future plans were concerned. He was to attend school, and walk very nearly a mile every day to get there ; but until we were in order, he was at our disposal—and Bob was a very useful family appendage ; if he did nothing else, he kept our spirits up. There was one thing that pleased me immensely. I had at last a

studio of my own. There was one little room that had been finished off in the garret like a large closet, with two shelves against the wall, and mother gave that room exclusively to me. There was one window, from which I had an extended view of the country, the sea, the strips of sand stretching like slender white arms across a little bay, the distant spires of one or two churches, and villas and farmhouses dotting the country side here and there. It looked like anything else but being out of the world, and it made a picture, from my eyrie in the roof, pretty enough to put on canvas, if I had possessed the power. After it was in perfect order, I called the family up to see. They all laughed when they saw my easel out, a sketch in charecoal on the rack, two or three studies in oil, which were crude enough, a plaster bust, and my color tubes laid on the shelves in a most orderly manner, with palette knife, mahl stick, and brushes, ready for use, and a rickety pine table in the centre of the room, with two kitchen chairs.

‘Bab means to fulfil her destiny here,’ said Nat, swinging his long legs from the window seat on which he was perched, and looking benignantly around on my possessions.

‘But don’t it look nice?’ I asked, with a comprehensive wave of my hand. ‘Don’t it look like a real artist?’

‘In a garret, too,’ laughed father. ‘Could anything be more appropriate or suggestive!’

‘Paint us no end of pictures, Bab, to put around the rooms,’ stipulated Meg; and mother patted my head, and said she was not at all ashamed of the clever little beginnings that adorned our parlor walls; she only regretted that I had to give my lessons up just when I was doing so well.

'Nature must be my teacher now,' I said magnanimously; and then Nat laughed good-naturedly, and wanted to know if I wouldn't like to go to the postoffice, and drive myself. Meg had something to do in the way of sewing, before she could go to church on Sunday. Flo was tired, Nat busy, and Bob had mysteriously disappeared; so I concluded to go, and take Bess. I knew how to hold the reins and guide a horse, having gained a little experience with sundry visits among country friends, and I knew the pony, as Aunt Janeway still called the superannuated old creature, had given up the frivolities and friskiness of youth, at least twenty years back, or father would not have given his consent so readily. There was a small phaeton, with a bulgy leather top, in the barn, and really it looked quite respectable when Nat had oiled and washed it, and harnessed Dolly before it. Bess was charmed. We never in all our lives had possessed such a mine of enjoyment as this promised to be. Father looked the harness all over, as he said this was one of the things that he hoped would reconcile me to a life in the country, and then he gave me minute directions as to the road I might take after going to the postoffice, and which, after describing almost a circle, would bring me safely back to our lane, with a tolerably good idea of our surroundings. The girls came out on the porch to see us off, Meg threw her slipper after us, and Bess and I leaned back comfortably in the old phaeton, while 'the pony' ambled rheumatically out on the highway, and so to the postoffice and through the village, and then toward another larger place, that father called a town, but was no town at all, so to speak. True there was a small hotel, or tavern, as the country people called it, a postoffice, with grocery, dry goods, and provision store all in one,

with a lumber and coal yard back of it, and which, like the town itself, was spread over such an extent of ground that it had every right to be pretentious, and maintain its dignity as a first-class store. It had two broad streets crossing each other at right angles ; tall old trees shaded it, and handsome dwellings stood back of well-clipped lawns and trim hedges, with here and there a bay window thrust out, as if to show that modern taste had stepped in to save the houses from that air of quaint similitude which is apt to flourish in out-of-the-way country places. There was also a gray, weather-beaten church, which gave the town importance, as well as one an idea of the past, with its small, square tower and pointed steeple, looking like an inverted tin funnel as it glistened in the sun. There was also a crown and ball atop of the funnel, for the church had been built when New Jersey belonged to the Crown, and was true and loyal in its fealty to the king. Father had told me of the church, and how every one in the country about loved and venerated it. And the crown was left there, though once our blue coats tried to shoot it away. Bess and I drove Dolly up to the fence, while we jumped out of the phaeton and went inside of the yard, and looked curiously up at it. Not that we republicans care for the crown ! It was just a bit of the old time, when it was considered sound doctrine to weigh well the Scripture injunction to 'fear God and honor the king'—a bit of the old time that it would be well to remember now, for in disobeying the latter injunction, sometimes we are apt to forget the former also. The Republic forgive me—I am almost tempted to go back and be a Tory ! How Nat would draw down the corners of his mouth if he should see this line in my little chronicle, and how father would lift his eyebrows—and I, just out

of school, as it were. It would be much the wiser plan for me to keep these pages to myself, I think. *Think*—there's the very word—women *will* think. Some people 'guess' and 'fancy,' and 'believe' or suppose; some even 'calculate' and 'reckon,' and here in New Jersey the aborigines 'allow'; but *think* is the better word, and to think for one's self—that is our privilege. Women will think, and that is a difficulty this country presents; even young girls and children do the same. Now Bess, who is barely eight years of age, plucked the skirts of my gown as we stood under the shadow of the tall trees, looking at the rows of defaced, gray tombstones, reading in quaint English that here 'ye worshipful Col.' So-and-so was buried, 'true to his country, his God, and his king.'

'What does it mean?' she asked, with an air of graye perplexity. 'What are we doing with a King here, sister Barbara?'

Poor Bess! In leaving the city she had stepped as it were into another world.

'We're not doing anything with him,' I answered with a short laugh. 'All that was finished up years ago, Bess. There is no King here except the memory of a dead old tyrant. We're not out of the world yet, child,—you'll learn all about it by and by.'

'I know it now, a little,' hesitated Bess. She never talked straight out with me as she did with the others. That was because I felt my years, and was apt to be priggish and take airs of age and wisdom on myself, which the others never did. But the newness, or rather the *oldness* of the thing, surprised her into thinking aloud. 'I know about the war,—the Revolution that was, Barbara. It is in my geography—and about the Tea spilled overboard—do you think it was right, sister?'

‘Why, of course, yes,’ I answered with another glance at the spire and the glittering crown, ‘right enough, I suppose.’

‘Well, then, what are all these wicked men buried here for?’ and Bessie’s cheeks were red at the presumption of the poor inanimate clay.

‘We must not be silly, Bess,’ I answered. ‘How do we know they were wicked?’

‘Why, if they fought for the King—’

‘Yes, but you can read it all there,’ I said, pointing to the flat, gray stone, again. “True to his God, his country, and his King”—he may have been a saint for all we know to the contrary, Bess.’

‘I don’t see how,’ and Bess shook her curls steadily. ‘Father says that people that are good, must do good things; and the Bible says “by their fruits ye shall know them.”’

I couldn’t help it,—I leaned upon a headstone, and burst out laughing right merrily; which was not the thing to do, I know, in a quiet country churchyard, surrounded not only by the old loyal dead, but where fresh rifts and faded flowers showed signs of sorrow that belonged even to our day. A step on the walk startled me, and I looked up just in time to see a gentleman in clerical dress pass into the church. His head was turned for a moment toward me, the grave eyes bent in inquiring disapproval upon us both, and then he was gone.

I came to myself in a moment, and called Bess, who was skipping about in the most sprightly fashion, reading aloud record after record on the moss grown, and sometimes fallen stones. It was astonishing how many ‘wicked men,’ as she persisted in calling them, were gathered together to await the last trump in this alien earth. And

side by side with them lay patriots,—the men we called good, the men who died to purchase our freedom,—which were right, and who were good? Side by side they peacefully rested in the broad, quiet sunshine; and Bess, with her yellow hair streaming about her shoulders, flashed like a sunbeam herself over each gray, lonely grave, with the inquiry resting upon her lips ‘Why were the good and bad all buried together, sister? Tell me, —I should like to know. Some fought for God and the King, and some for God and their country,—it says so on the stones. There must be a lie somewhere.’

‘God will tell at the judgment,’ I said softly. ‘Don’t ask such questions again, Bess,’ taking her hand in mine. ‘See, there is to be a funeral,’ pointing to a newly dug grave that I had not noticed before. ‘We ought not to have come in at all, perhaps,’ and we hurried away, Bessie’s eyes growing wider as she gave an awestruck glance down into the dark pit, yawning almost at our feet. She did not speak for a long time again, not until we had jogged slowly half of the way home.

‘I would not like to be buried there, sister,’ she shuddered, ‘in that ugly, black place, and among all those men.’

But to me it looked sweet and still, lying quietly in the Summer sunshine,—a peaceful place, and a fit spot to bury old feuds, and where it did not matter whether the coat worn in life were red or blue, now that the grave had closed over it.

CHAPTER IV.

THE NEW EDEN.

Our drive home was rather a silent one, for both Bess and I had a good deal of thinking to do, though we stopped the old horse to take a good look at the country now and then. And the home lane was beautiful as we drove down under the blossoming trees, and Meg looked like a picture, as she rocked herself to and fro on the front piazza, with a bunch of flowers in her lap that she was making up into a nosegay, to adorn the tea-table, I knew. We girls had promised ourselves this little luxury all the Summer through, if the flower beds amounted to anything. Meantime Nat supplied us from the wood. She waved her straw hat to us as we drove in through the gate, and then running half way down the steps to meet me, called out

‘Have you had a nice time? So have we. We’ve had three calls—that is, three in one—our neighbors, you know—the ones who used to live in this house; and they say it’s just charming down here—they wouldn’t go back to the city for the world.’

‘Dear me! wouldn’t they?’ I responded. ‘Well, perhaps when I’m just ready to drop into the grave, I’ll like it too. Here Bess,’ and I gave the reins into her hands, and puffed up with importance, she drove around to the barn all alone by herself. ‘You must take F’lo on Monday, if it’s pleasant, and see it all. It is pretty. You can’t drive a mile without a glint of water flashing upon you from some source. If it isn’t the sea, it’s a cove or a stream, a river or a brook; and men in boats

are raking oysters or clams, and bare-legged boys are hanging to the bridges, fishing or crabbing ; and there's lots of little villages, with just a depot and a store, and pretty, quiet-looking houses. The whole world was asleep in the sunshine this morning, though. I only saw one person who acted as if he were not sitting to be photographed. And the quaintest old church ! Bess and I got out and walked all through the graveyard. It's Revolutionary ground here, Meg—every step of it. There was to be a funeral—there's the bell now,' as the sound of a far away steady tolling came to our ears.

'Isn't it sweet,' said Meg, stopping to listen with a grave, awed look in her blue eyes.

'What a girl you are ! No ; it's horrible to be buried in that black, dreadful ground, and in such a dilapidated, lonely spot. It gives me the shivers to think of it !' forgetting that a little while before I had settled in my own mind that it was peaceful, beautiful, and still.

I turned to go away, and then came back. 'By the way, we saw the clergyman—I suppose it was the clergyman. Bess and I were laughing and having a very comfortable time spelling out the horrid old inscriptions, when he came down the walk. He looked as if he thought we were committing sacrilege, and walked away disgusted. I'm sure we didn't mean any harm. How did I know that they had just finished digging a grave, and there was to be a funeral ? I suppose it was wrong for us to be so merry, though.'

'Perhaps he didn't notice you,' said Meg.

'O yes he did. His eyes were brown, and they were as grave and disapproving as yours are sometimes. So you liked the people who called to day ?'

'Ever so much—the mother and two daughters—older

than we are, I should say. They apologized for calling so soon. I rather think they did not expect to see us settled and quite in order to receive visitors ; but Mrs. Desmond had just heard that we were Church people, and she wanted to claim us for their little particular church ; it seems there are several around here, and theirs, she says, is small and poor, and needs every one. Flo offered to take a class in Sunday-school right off, and so did I, and the young ladies seemed very much pleased.'

'I dare say. I sha'n't take one, though,' in my usual spirit of antagonism.

'I liked the Miss Desmonds,' Meg continued, taking no notice of my freak. 'They are very quiet, however, and I really do believe it annoys them to have their mother talk so much. We managed to get in a few words edgewise, as, mother and Flo being at home, our force was nearly equal to theirs. But Mrs. Desmond could talk two like mother down any day.'

'Were they dressed very much ?'

'O yes, very much. They came in a pretty low carriage, with driver in livery, all very grand,' and Meg smiled as complacently as if she had been attired in satin, and sitting in state to receive them.

'And we'll return the call on foot in our gray serges, with the dust all over our boots, or else go lumbering along—the whole family together—in that old black hearse that Uncle Janeway had the audacity to give us, and that Bess will call a family carriage. Nat can drive us, I suppose, with a pair of old party gloves cleaned up to make it look like a livery. I won't go.'

'How silly,' said Meg in her tranquil way. 'Don't forget that we are ladies, Bab, my dear, and if we choose to go on foot, Mrs. Desmond and her daughters would

think no less of us. I told them quite frankly that we were very plain people, not in the country as they are, for pleasure, although we were going to do our very best to yoke pleasure and duty together.'

'O I've no doubt you told them enough,' I said shortly, all my pride flaming up in my face, 'and they were immensely edified, of course. Did you tell them that it was Uncle Janeway's farm, and, because father was the unfortunate one of the family, he let us have it free of rent? O you didn't, eh? That was kind, Meg. I didn't expect such diplomacy from you. And you didn't tell them how many dresses we had apiece, and just the state of our finances all around? Then you were very remiss, I can tell you. What did you talk about, I wonder?'

'The new rector, for one thing, and you for another. We had quite a discussion on Art. Mother introduced "my daughter Barbara" on the wall, as "my daughter Barbara" wasn't here to be introduced herself. And Mrs. Desmond stepped off a few paces as if she were measuring a duelling ground, and made a tube of her gloved hand, inspecting them thoroughly. She thinks you amazingly clever! I know she went away with correct impressions of our importance as a family, for she admitted that we were an acquisition—quite an acquisition—to society here. Cheer up, Bab! You see we are admitted already. We are, so to speak, hovering on the outer edge of the charmed circle just now, but we shall be in—quite to the hub, my dear, as soon as we are thoroughly known. You an artist, Flo a saint, and I a philanthropist.'

When Meg began she was like Tennyson's Brook, she would 'run on forever,' and there was no stopping her.

‘O Meg,’ I said, ‘I do sometimes get so disgusted with you, I wonder that we never have an out and out quarrel.’

Instead of being vexed with my tantrums, as any one else would have had a good right to be, Meg went off into the most tantalizing little ripples of laughter, then taking hold of each side of her pretty cambrie dress she danced and bowed before me as if she were bent upon doing me a reverence.

‘Bab! you poor, blighted, frail flower!’ she cried, ‘I’m afraid the storms of this life will be too much for you. If you knew when you looked well, you’d put on a tinsel crown, let your back hair down, and set up for heavy tragedy the rest of your life.’

‘I certainly must be different from any one else,’ I said half pleasantly, for good humor is infectious, and Meg always knew the shortest way to bring me down from my lofty elevation. Even the strange young clergyman whom we met in the church-yard this morning gave me a look as if he thought me a Kalmuck Tartar just arrived. I’m disgusted with myself and everybody else, and of all hard things in the world its the hardest to be poor.’

‘My afflicted young relative!’ shouted Bob, who had clattered around the piazza just in time to catch my last remark. In a moment his by no means immaculate handkerchief was applied to my eyes, and catching me about the waist, we staggered around the piazza, he pretending to sob and bewail my woes.

‘Unburden your heart, my sweet sister. Let me share your grief, or I die,’ he cried, imitating my tragic tones.

‘You are a perfect ruffian, Bob!’ and I angrily disengaged my arm, and tossed away his handkerchief.

‘Why, Barbara, my dear,’ said Flo, in her soft, grave way, as she stepped out of the open window to see what the tumult was about, ‘don’t speak in that way to your brother. Stop and think for a moment.’

‘O Flo, I can’t be good, like you,’ I burst out, ‘and take it all easy as if the world were one long Sunday. Everything worries me, and I’m tired, and homesick, and cross.’

‘And hungry too,’ added Bob with instant penitence, coming to the rescue. ‘Why, I feel like a hunter, myself. I’ll go and hurry up mother’s special artist in the kitchen, and after dinner we’ll all feel serene enough to go out on the knoll yonder and see the wonders of the sea. Cheer up, Bab. You were born to be a Queen and eat out of a gold dish, we all know.’

And on he went to the kitchen to see the ‘special artist’ whose powers, to judge by her face, were limited. I was going to follow him, but Flo put out a detaining hand and laid it gently on my sleeve.

‘Stop a minute, Barbara, darling. I want to speak to you. I wish you could feel as quiet and peaceful as the day. Stop a moment and look. The world seems so lovely to me, why can’t we ourselves be in tune with Nature?’

‘Speak for yourself, Flo,’ I said. ‘I think you always are in tune.’

‘No, dear, no ; but life seems so little, so short, and every idle word we utter must *live forever*—it is such an overwhelming thought to me sometimes.’

I had not a word to say. I never had to Flo. Meg would have ridiculed me or scolded me soundly if she had taken it upon herself to administer reproof ; but Meg had a matter of fact way of looking a fault squarely

in the face and treating it as she would have treated an unruly child, while Flo was apt to go a little beyond—taking higher ground as it were, and that seemed to lift her into a different atmosphere from ours—a something infinitely purer than I could ever understand. Perhaps that was one reason why I fell back upon Meg for companionship, when in truth it should have been Flo, as she was nearer my own age. She kept her hand still on mine, waiting for the answer that did not come, but my eyes followed hers as they rested on the quiet scene spread before us, and that, and the touch of her hand, quieted me—such a peaceful old earth it was. The cattle were lowing in the meadow land, the swallows twittering about the roof, and the fowls were clucking in the barnyard as merrily as if an egg were an important scientific discovery, and all the machinery of our little individual world was going on serenely under the bluest of skies and the brightest of sunshine. How could one help being ‘in tune’? A striped squirrel ran like a flash along the fence and up the trunk of a huge butternut tree, turning his head sideways, as much as to say while he gave us a sharp look, ‘New comers, eh? Janeway Farm is let, to be sure; now what sort of people may you be?’

I leaned forward and touched my lips to Flo’s. I could not *say* a word, but that night when the purple twilight was filling the room, and mother’s fingers were busy with the knitting that could go on without need of day or lamp light, I drew a stool to her side, and laying my head against her shoulder, I let some of the quiet and rest of the time into my heart while we talked over the events of the day. The twilight was always our ‘confession time,’ and the stool by mother’s side the

confessional. I was there oftener than any one else, although we all had a fashion of 'owning up' to our mother before we could go to bed and sleep peacefully. First and foremost my silly anger, and then my wicked pride—my rebellious murmurings against poverty—not the grinding hard poverty that so many people around us were suffering, but the simple denial of luxuries and grandeur—a selfish repining that we were not rich ; this was the spirit that I had indulged in all through the day.

I shall not tell what mother said to me. Everybody knows—at least those who are blessed with mothers. I often pity those who have never known anything about it. There are so many wise things that a mother can say—at least *our* mother can—and there are so many unwise things that we children say and do. The Prayer Book has it set down for us so perfectly, 'We have left undone those things which we ought to have done ; and we have done those things which we ought not to have done.'

I often look at large families and think what endless comedies and tragedies are going on every day, and wonder, with Bob, if six children are as good as a travelling circus, how a family of ten or twelve manage ; or rather, how one mother, who must be manager, director, and property clerk, all in one, can get along with the lot. Any one to look at our mother, with her pale sweet face and blue eyes, her gentle ways and cooing voice, would regard her in any light but that of proprietor of said circus. One would think she must be full of cares, and worn and faded, but a glance at her face dispels that. It is just the face that one would love to say mother to, and one that could only have grown so sweet and beau-

tiful by sitting much at the cradles of little ones, or hushing them to sleep in her tender arms. Yes; mother is just mother—what more can I say? But it is Meg, not Flo, who is going to be like her one of these days, when she has lived long enough, and been made perfect enough through suffering, as our mother has.



CHAPTER V.

NEW FRIENDS.

The rector of the church in which the family of Desmond worshipped was an old man, and had stood at his post for many, many years. He had baptized and married the children who were now gray-haired men and women, and in due course of time performed the same rites for their children. He had rejoiced with them in their joy, and mourned with them when they buried their dead ; and now in his old age, all he asked was to die among those whom he in an especial manner regarded as his people. But the old parish was large, and the duties heavy, and when little villages sprung up and dotted the country side, there was an earnest demand for other churches. It was not every family that could afford a carriage and horses to drive five, six, or even ten miles to church of a Sunday, to say nothing of the Sunday-school and weekly services ; so after a time two parishes were formed out of the old one, and Mr. Leighton, who could not say nay to his people, followed them to the new church, which had been born to him like a child in his old age. And like a tender infant, he had guarded it in its struggle for life, until at last the little offshoot was declared quite independent, and able to stand upon its feet, as it were, and maintain an individuality of its own. Now they were about contemplating an assistant rector ; but with a kindly reverence, they still held their old pastor as head, and the new comer—whoever he might be—would only be an assistant after all. Mrs. Desmond, who, from coming occasionally to

the seashore of a Summer, had settled down into living there all the year round, was one of the ablest supporters of St. Thomas. It was she who had started the movement in the first place, put down her name for the largest subscription, and contrived by her activity and zeal to keep it thoroughly wide awake now. They owned a pretty Gothic structure of rough stone, with really fine stained windows, and a good bell swinging in the little pointed tower, and they could afford beside, to give Mr. Leighton the regular salary to which he had been accustomed, as well as lay by something toward the time when a young assistant should come, who would, one of these days, have to be made rector.

It was to this church that father and mother had rather pledged themselves at the time of our neighbor's call, and to which we all drove the Sunday after we were settled. I say all, but Bob and I walked. It was not a mile from our house, and it was less of a humiliation to appear in dusty boots, than for me to eschew my principles and go with the caravan. I said nothing, however, for mother's little talk had quite shamed and sobered me; and Bob, who was one of the best natured of fellows, was quite willing to be my escort, having entirely put out of his mind my rebuff of the day before, so our walk was a pleasant one in every sense of the word.

And the church was pretty, the congregation devout, and Mr. Leighton, though very old, preached a good sermon—that is. all that I heard of it was good; for my thoughts wandered, and my eyes would rove over the little congregation, and I wondered 'who was who,' and if we should ever feel an interest in any of those strange faces. I picked out Mrs. Desmond and her two daughters at once; one of them was seated at the organ, and

my worldly eyes took in the fashionable cut of their dresses, and the unmistakably French creations that adorned their heads. There were several city families apparently, some of them strangers like ourselves, but I was glad to see that our entrance into church, and the formal seating of eight persons, created a little movement of interest among them all. I knew we would be stared at—new comers always are; and in a small country parish every one counts. I felt that I looked well, when I put on my new gray serge, and took a survey of myself in the glass, and turned my head first one way, then another, to get a good view of the soft pink roses on my chip hat. I looked well, and certainly Meg, with her bright, sunshiny face, and Flo, in her calm, serene beauty, would go a very long way towards making the right kind of impression. But Flo was entirely unconscious of the interest she might excite; though, as I gave her one glance, I thought I had never seen her looking more beautiful. I wondered if her thoughts ever wandered like mine into all sorts of speculations, mixing up the service strangely and wrongfully with worldly things; but no, her golden head was bowed devoutly during the prayers, her pure lips opened only for the responses, and her eyes never wandered as mine did, from the white haired clergyman to the congregation, back to the clergyman, and then to the young lady at the organ, with her exquisitely white hands and faultless dress. Flo had lofty conceptions of a religious life, that I very well knew. Other people might have called some of her fancies whims, though we never allowed ourselves to talk about such things; but since I could remember, there had always been in my mind a certain awe and deference of Flo's religious character. Perhaps her love of ceremo-

nial was to be attributed to that love for the beautiful that was an inherent part of her nature ; for simply as we had been brought up, Flo was the only one of the family who had a touch of ritualism in her. She couldn't help it any more than she could her breathing. It was as natural for her to bow her head, to fold her hands upon her breast, and to assume reverential attitudes, which in the last few years have been regarded with such suspicion, as it was for me to wander in my thoughts, and sometimes forget entirely where I was. In mediæval days Flo would have been in a cloister ; in the eighteenth century it was hard to define her place. But it was of no manner of use to talk with her about it, or try to persuade her into another way of thinking. She was not argumentative, she was simply devout. To her the whole letter of the law was Love, and she fulfilled it—what more could one ask ? And yet I saw Mrs. Desmond, who was churchly to a degree, and wore the Thirty-nine Articles as she wore her jewels—open her eyes with a sort of perplexed stare, when Flo's head bowed with childlike reverence at the sacred name of the Trinity in the Glorias. Thereupon I made up my mind that I would not like Mrs. Desmond at all, no matter what the opinion of the other members of the family might be. Meg introduced me to her while we all stood together in the porch waiting for carriages to come around. She seemed to know everybody in church, greeting some with a shake of the hand, while for all she had a bow, a smile, or a few pleasant words. And yet I could not say that I was agreeably impressed, therefore it was Mrs. Desmond who started the conversation.

'I was so sorry not to see you, as well as your sisters, when I called yesterday,' she began, as she laid the tips

of her lilac gloves upon my arm, 'though it was merely an informal visit. I am not at all conventional, you will find, and I detest formal visiting, my dear. That is one of the privileges the country gives us—freedom in everything. I hope you like your new home?'

I said 'Yes, though we had seen very little of it as yet,—the rain had kept us at home, for one thing.'

'The rain—O yes; but now it is warm and lovely—quite like June, and the country will be charming. And the little church, how do you like it? Perfect, isn't it? We think so. O Miss Homans—excuse me, pray, but I want you all to know Miss Homans; another acquisition to our little parish, Miss Homans—Miss Fox, Miss Florilla, Miss Barbara Fox—isn't it delightful? Only think, there are eight of them. And we "count heads," as children do, when we go into Church matters—O indeed we do, Mr. Fox!'

She had a soft, pleasant voice; a voice that somehow reminded one of the drip of Summer rain, only that there was a feeling of consciousness about it that spoiled the sweetness to me, and she rambled on without waiting for more than an ordinary assent (I fancy a dissent was something that she never encountered in this little community).

'It is so comforting to have Church families settle here; not that I'm illiberal, exclusive, or that sort of thing—I'm very conservative, Mr. Fox, very conservative,' with a nice little off hand nod to my father, by way of point to her remarks, 'and I make it a duty to carry the principle into every act of my life. Nothing is gained by extremes either way, you know—it quite upsets everything.'

The youngest Miss Desmond, the one who presided at the organ, here bowed to us, and ventured to touch her

mother and say 'The carriage is waiting, mamma,' and then to settle herself luxuriously on the crimson cushions, leaning back with an air of long suffering waiting, while her voluble mamma chatted on.

'Ah! yes, my dear Bella, yes, presently. I hope we shall meet here, very often, Mr. Fox.'

Father smiled patiently, while Nat held the horse by the head, who really looked as if it would be an act of Christian charity to give him support of any kind in view of the heat and the five people he was to amble off with, as if the whole thing were a mere feather's weight and nothing to speak of. I, for one, felt myself growing hot and cold by turns, while the family ark was being filled and got under way, but I could not escape from Mrs. Desmond, who had taken condescending possession of me, while she was saying good-bye to the others. She had lived on Janeway Farm for such a length of time that it seemed as if it were natural for her to regard us as part of her own domestic economy. I did not agree with her for one, and held myself haughtily aloof, but my hauteur rolled off the smooth surface of her politeness like oil from marble.

'I want you to ride home with us,' she said, laying her gloved hand lightly on my arm. 'We can drop you at your gate as well as not, you know. That's the beauty of only numbering three—the only beauty about it, I do assure you. I do so like to see large families—so comfortable, and all that. But we always have an empty seat to offer to a friend, and it's a long, dusty walk, in the sun.'

'Thanks,' opening my sun umbrella as I spoke, 'but I walk from choice. There was a vacant seat in our—hearse,' I said, abruptly breaking the momentary pause.

The Miss Desmonds smiled languidly at my *brusquerie*,

but the mother gave my lips a little tap with her fan as she put one foot on the low step of the carriage.

‘Don’t be naughty and call dear old Mr. Janeway’s carriage such a melancholy name. It was lovely, positively lovely, I declare, to see the dear, white-haired couple, riding around in that ancient vehicle, with their children and grand-children. So simple and rural, you know, and quite a matter of choice. He was a great favorite of mine, and a very well-to-do-farmer, as they say in these parts.’

‘And my father’s uncle,’ I added drily.

‘Dear me, a relative—I had no idea; then your family shall have a double claim to our regard. But won’t you change your mind and take the empty seat? No? So sorry; good-bye then.’ And nodding her flowers once or twice, she stepped into the carriage, and I turned to Bob, who had been a silent spectator.

‘Come along,’ I said spitefully, as I trailed my gray serge in the dust. ‘Did you ever see such a woman, Bob? As if I’d be under obligation to her for a ride! I’m glad I called the old one-horse ark a hearse. She’ll know at least that I’m ashamed of it. There’s comfort in that.’

‘What a serene frame of mind for Sunday,’ remarked Bob.

‘Yes, isn’t it awful, and Flo so tranquil and happy. I wonder why Flo and I are so unlike.’

‘Unlike?’ echoed Bob. ‘Why Flo is like none of us. I looked at her in church to-day, and I thought I had never seen a picture of a saint that looked more like a picture, or a saint too, for that matter, than our Flo when she bent her head in the Gloria. Bab, I wonder what she does that for?’

'She can't help it, Bob. We never could understand it, but to Flo it is a necessary reverence. I believe it was a look that Mrs. Desmond gave her that made me dislike her. She evidently likes the topmost seat in the synagogue, where she can look over all our heads, and work out her own pet schemes of philanthropy. How such a woman has ever been able to sever herself from the charms of a city life, and settle down permanently in the country, are points left to the widest conjecture.'

Bob summed it up in a few words—that is, his opinion of it :

'One is lost in the city, you know—a mere atom—a grain of sand on the shore ; while here one may be a queen,' *Dei Gratia*.'

Perhaps, after all, this was as good a solution of the matter as any other



CHAPTER VI.

THE JESUIT BROTHER

Miss Homans called as soon as practicable, after our informal introduction by Mrs. Desmond at the church door, and many other ladies of the parish followed her example, including deaf old Mrs. Leighton, who was lovely in spite of her years and infirmities. In due time we returned the visits, Meg and I walking about with card-cases in our pockets and parasols in our hands, while mother and Flo drove off serenely in the family ark.

We had begun right off to live an out of door existence in the fresh moist May, and all of that first lovely Spring month spent most of our time in *finding out things*, but we didn't begin to understand life in the country until June came, with its perfumed air, fresh, strong, and full of sea scents, intoxicating us like a draught of champagne. In fact, we drank wine most of the time—home-brewed, Atlantic Ocean wine. The blossoms flushed and paled upon the fruit trees in the orchard behind the house, white petals drifted everywhere like snow flakes, the perfume of the garden stole up to our open windows with the morning dews to baptize it, the bluebirds flashed from bough to bough, and the robins chirped familiarly almost in our faces, with an air of saying 'Well, what do you think of us, and what have you to say against the country now?' I hadn't anything to say, of course,—that is to them,—but I watched them, wheeling and rollicking in the glad sunshine, as if their life were one long quadrille, chasséeing in and out of the

budding branches, making 'ladies chains' and 'dos-a-dos,' or performing half tipsy jigs on the rocking tips of the twigs, and I couldn't help calling out 'Meg! Meg! even in May our poem has begun, and the birds are singing it for us, not waiting for the words to be written down.' That was the feeling that came to me. My heart seemed very full, and a sudden sense of pleasantness in living, stole upon me.

We saw the Spring coquet with Summer, the sunshine growing stronger each day, until June in all its glory burst upon us. We loitered through the woods, bright with robes of gauzy green, recklessly treading down blue-eyed violets and daisies, while every breath we drew seemed a growth of soul and body in God's beautiful world of light and love. People miss just one-half of life who never see all this! Everything is so thoroughly equal to the occasion. Even the grass under our feet struggled up instinct with life of some kind. If we overturned a stone, a whole family of wriggling, mouse-colored atoms were surprised in an active state of unrest, legs and arms all going like so many microscopic windmills; if we peeped in a dusky bush, we heard a chirp, saw a flash of yellow throats, and knew 'somebody's mother' was expected, if strangers were not. Bugs and gauzy winged insects were alert even in the most silent nooks, and sober brown beetles crawled out on the warm sandy ledges, while the birds about us seemed in a perpetual state of self-gratulation, in that they were alive and the sun shone. Everything panted, stirred, lived, and breathed in a sort of golden ecstasy. Bob put our combined thought, or rather our hardly defined thought, into words:

'I'm going to leave off saying I'm seventeen,' he announced. 'I'm just going to begin life here, and this is

my first birthday. You'll all please remember, I'm going to go back and begin over.' And that is what we all felt like doing, though we didn't put it in Bob's own words.

I know that I, for one, tried my best to begin all over. I loved the country, and I was not ashamed to say so. I loved the farm, the beautiful slopes of meadow, and the woods that we were constantly exploring; above all, the great, wonderful ocean, charmed me with its mysterious utterances and awful power. In my changed mood I even forgot my former hostility to the black vehicle that I had dubbed a hearse, and allowed myself to occupy a seat within its funereal depths while Bob or Nat drove us about to see the country; and I took perfect delight in the phaeton and superannuated colt that Uncle Janeway had left for our use. Also I had fits of great activity, up in my garret studio, and at such seasons would work myself into a fine state of enthusiasm over the marine view that I was secretly attempting to reproduce. I was obliged to work the problem out alone, however, as a teacher could not be found near us, and knowing the family tendency to ridicule, I kept my embryo efforts to myself. With me art was a passion, but it was also a secret. Only to my dearest Meg, from whom I could keep nothing, did I dare to whisper the hopes which my fancy spread before me. I hid it from all else, as the striped squirrel in the old butternut tree hid his nuts, only indulging in a private nibble when I was alone. But alas! there was only one time when I rose to the height of a true artist, and that was at night—in my dreams. With magical brushes I painted rare and impossible distances, soft sea mists, stretches of foamy shingle, and clear, translucent depths of blue. Only in dreams did I realize my vague

longings—only in dreams did I work out the poem I was never able to utter.

It was no longer balmy weather in my garret studio, but decidedly close and stifling, yet I worked on diligently in the early morning, without the faintest perception that I, like most young girls, was caricaturing art in my blissful simplicity. Bob opened my eyes one day, when he strolled into my den, and before I could secrete my picture, offered the following advice :

‘Bab, put on your hat, you silly old dreamer, and come and look at the element you are trying so hard to torture into waves. Why, if I were Neptune, I’d bring an action against you for libel.’

‘Then I am glad you are simply Bob Fox,’ I said, swallowing my mortification, and fidgeting with my palette knife.

‘Come, scrape up your colors, and let fame go to the dogs, Bab. You might as well give it up, and go out with us to the woods.’

‘I wont!’ I said desperately. Yet I saw for myself, without his aid, the hard lines, the opaque color, the utter absence of transparency—and I could have cried with vexation.

‘I have a great mind to rub my brush over it, and never try again,’ I said vehemently, as I stepped back and surveyed my many days’ toil.

‘No, no ; don’t do it. You are tired now, and awfully vexed with me. Come out, my charmer, and forget all about it. We’ve got umbrellas and baskets, and we’re going to pilfer all the flowers we can, for the festival to-morrow. Let’s kill two birds with one stone—have a jolly good holiday, and help the Sunday-school. I wont enjoy it half as much if you are not along, Bab,

and you are just roasting yourself to death in this hot garret.'

'Don't tell any one, Bobby, that I was trying to paint this libel, then?'

'Never a word—trust me.'

'Then I won't keep you a minute,' I uttered gleefully. 'I'll drop my palette in a basin of cold water, and be with you in a twinkling. Is Meg going?'

'Meg? of course. Mistress Meg won't stir a peg, unless you join the crowd, ma'am,' he sang. 'We march six strong, so come along—Barbara, would you be kind enough to compose another line for me?'

'Nonsense!' I said. 'Bob, is there any paint on my face?'

'Only a daub of Prussian blue on your nose. I wouldn't take it off. It's becoming, and shows you're an artist. You know they're all waiting, I suppose.'

I ran down stairs rubbing my nose all the way, and found them on the piazza, Meg and Flo with baskets on their arms and scissors hanging to their girdles. The children were not only to have their Trinity Festival, on the morrow, but it was also expected that the new Assistant would make his appearance, and there was quite a flutter of preparation in consequence.

'Bab, your nose is the color of indigo,' Meg announced, 'and your hands look as if they hadn't touched water in a week. Pray let me ask, are you going in your war paint, like a savage?'

'Why, to be sure; who will see me up in those woods? I need not stop to beautify myself for such an excursion,' I explained, as I tied my broad-brimmed hat under my chin, and caught up the lunch basket.

'Flo will save us from disrepute, if we meet any of the

aborigines,' she agreed, and then we took up our line of march. Bob acted as pioneer, while Bess danced along by his side, he making a trombone out of his umbrella, upon which he discoursed the most ear-piercing music as we marched past the sitting-room window waving a good-bye to mother. Nat and Flo followed arm in arm, for Flo was not strong, and some way Nat always offered her that mark of deference, just as he did to mother. Meg and I loitered a little behind, as I had my tribulations of the morning to impart to her, and receive my usual amount of comfort and encouragement in return.

I wonder if I could ever exist without Meg? It seems to me that I would be just nothing at all without her advice and sympathy. Her life goes in and out with mine like a piece of mosaic, and if one of the blocks—no matter how tiny—were to be left out, the whole thing would be spoiled. It seems strange that it should be so, for Meg is always practical, quiet and full of common-sense, where I am all theory and guesswork. It helps make up the perfect block, though, she says with a smile, but it is the symmetry of her lines that hide the ugly, uneven edges of mine. I know it, though she wont allow it—my dear, practical, so many years older sister.

So I unburdened my heart to Meg as we followed Bob, who led the way with a step so swift that it was as much as we could do to keep him in sight. We made our way as best we could up the slope, back of the house, to the pine wood skirting the cliff. A narrow foot path wound among the tall trees, only a few yards from the edge of the cliff; and once there, we had an unobstructed view of the great ocean swaying beneath our feet, a translucent blue melting into purple far away on the horizon. We paused a moment to look back at the white farmhouse

nestling among the spreading trees, and Nat said, pointing toward it,

‘What a sweet old place it is already—our dear old Cloverly.’

That was the name mother had given the place. We called it one of her inspirations. Father and the boys were to be the busy bees in this our little clover patch, and the honey when they had stored it up—why, the honey was to be divided among us all. Somehow we felt as if we were having the honey beforehand—not waiting for the hot mid-Summer when it should be gathered in. We were a happy family then—yes, and we are now, though the shadows lie softly, just like the sunshine on the meadows—no matter how fair the day, the shadows are there—and so, though they have fallen between that time and this, we only half feel their gloom, for we are happy, though we sometimes smile through a mist of tears.

We stop to rest in a sort of glade, where the trees arching overhead made a long dim walk, beyond which we could see the glint of the sea.

‘It is like going to church,’ I said under my breath, for there was a solemn glory about the place that afternoon, with the long swaths of sunlight gleaming athwart the trees and making still darker by contrast the quiet walk that lay between.

‘It is more like a great cathedral aisle,’ said Nat, involuntarily taking off his hat, and looking up at the interlacing boughs. ‘It makes one think of Horace Smith, and his

“Fane most catholic and solemn
That God has planned.”

I think I shall like coming here. Wont you, Flo?’

‘It is just the place to bring Thomas à Kempis, and

read it all alone by one's self,' with a quick glance up at him. 'We will call it the Cathedral Walk, dear, and I shall love it above all the places around here, I know.'

'It can't begin with the view a little farther on,' shouted Bob, with a wave of his cap. 'Don't stand there in that gloomy place, but come out this way. Here's a feast for you, Bab. Here's a real ocean for you to spoon over. There ! stand just where Flo does, and you'll get it,' pointing with his forefinger. 'Did you ever see anything like it before in all your life ?'

'Never,' we all said with one breath, and then sat down to enjoy it in silence.

Flo walked down nearly to the edge of the bluff, and putting one arm around the stem of a scarred old cedar, looked out from under her long slender hand, as she shaded her eyes from the bright light.

'O ! perfect !' she said : not suddenly, but with a slow dwelling on the words, as if words but poorly expressed it after all. Flo's voice was peculiar and beautiful. In it lay a world of power. She never spoke loudly or authoritatively, yet in the wildest uproar we always heard it, and stopped to listen ; it was so like a steady chime in the midst of jangling bells. And then she always felt things so much. I saw the sunshine deepen on her face, and the flash of quick delight in her eyes, though she never said anything but just 'oh ! perfect !' with a sort of holding in of her breath ; but Bess took up the thought that Flo had only expressed in a look.

'It's just as if we had died and waked up in Paradise, isn't it sister ?' she asked softly, creeping nearer to Flo.

Flo smiled, and patted the golden head nestling against her shoulder.

'I want to feel nearer to God every day that I live,'

she said with her eyes fixed dreamily upon the sea, 'and I think He will seem so close to me here.'

'I wish I were more like you, Flo,' interrupted Bob, switching the grass with a limp mullen stalk. 'Now it just looked jolly to me, and made me want to shout and climb the trees and go in for the goodiest kind of a time; and it makes you feel more like praying than anything else, I do believe. I declare, I never thought of it. I wish I could be religious just for once, to see how it seemed.'

'Why, Robin,' said Bess, in a little surprised whisper, 'you are religious, aren't you? I am sure I've always thought you were a very, very good boy. I never heard you say a wicked thing in my life, though you tease us awfully sometimes, but you go to church and Sunday-school—'

'Thank you, mum,' said Bob, with a grimace. 'It's a werry consoling thought that somebody appreciates me. I'd like to be a little surer, though, that I am worth it. But if you want flowers, we must not sit here idling all day.'

'We can come back and lunch in our Cathedral Walk, Flo dear, and gaze our fill, if you like it so much,' said Nat; 'but now let us find that mythical bank that Bob would have us believe is all ready for us, "covered with eglantine, moss, and rose." Lead the way, Bob.'

We picked up our baskets and loitered a little longer on the top of the cliff.

'What a beautiful world it is,' said Meg, 'now we are where we can see something of it. We only read and thought about it before we came here to live.'

Yes, it really did seem like a little world. There to our right lay the city we had so lately left, with a soft

hazy cloud resting close over it—very faint, far off, and too minute to pick out anything except general outline, but more like a picture to be looked at through a stereoscope—then green islands dotting the deep blue—a close white line of sand girdling it on one side, and on the other, as far as the eye could reach, nothing but sea and sky.

Then we went back into the woods, up and down among the cedars and scrub oaks, treading nameless mystical odors under foot, and absolutely revelling in the warmth and beauty of the day. It was so lovely that we could not settle down to the mere gathering of wild flowers. Bob called it a playing truant day—a day when we all felt that we had run away from school. There was so much to see, and the whole world seemed spread before us, as much as to say ‘Take any path you choose, my dears—it all lies here before you.’ At least that is the way I interpreted the message, and Bob and I generally read those things alike. Meg and Flo absorbed the sweetness more quietly; and to Flo I think there were words of deeper import, spoken—a whispered ‘come up higher’—as she stood looking and dreaming out upon the sea.

After a little we went back to the shady quiet place which Nat insisted upon naming the Cathedral Walk, of which we all thoroughly approved. We found ourselves seats under the arching trees, Meg opened the baskets, and we lunched as merrily as if it were the richest feast spread before us. Then, without wasting another moment in loitering and finding out views, we went back into the woods, cutting wild flowers, and filling our baskets with everything pretty in that way that we could find.

‘Somebody has been here before us,’ said Meg sudden-

ly. 'The flowers are all gone, Bob, and there were plenty, you said, yesterday when you reconnoitered.'

'That's true,' said Bob. 'Perhaps somebody has been thinking of the Sunday-school as well as ourselves. Suppose we be content with going home and stripping the garden. There's all the roses along the side of the hedge.'

'My poor roses!' said Nat. 'Well, I'll give you half of them. I'm sure I can afford to be generous, after this lovely day.'

We strolled through the meadows back of the farm, gathering violets and wood anemones, stopping to rest occasionally under the shade of a tree, finally reaching Nat's rose walk, a perfect mass of roses of every hue and size, that ran along one side of the trim hedge bordering the road. Meg and Flo pulled out their scissors and went to work clipping with a will, judiciously selecting the buds, and leaving the fully opened flowers to gladden Nat's eyes for a brief space of time. I threw off my hat, sat down on the grass, and began making curls out of dandelion stems to hang upon my ears and in my dishevelled head, while Bob stretched himself at full length by my side, tilted his hat on his face and went to sleep, or made a feint of doing so.

Just then a voice sounded over the hedge, pleasantly enough I must confess,

'I beg pardon, ladies, but if I might be so bold, may I beg a few roses for the Trinity Festival, to-morrow?'

We all started and turned quickly around; and Flo, who is usually slow and deliberate in all her movements, spoke first, bowing slightly to the head and shoulders towering above the arbor vitæ hedge, with her quiet air of dignity.

‘These are for the Trinity Festival, sir. We are gathering them for our own scholars.’

‘I beg pardon again,’ and with another lifting of the hat he was gone.

‘Now who upon earth is that?’ I said, starting up the minute the vision had disappeared.

‘I can’t imagine,’ said Meg, ‘perhaps some friend of Mr. Leighton’s. He must be a clergyman, from his dress, and he must be staying somewhere in the village, for he spoke of the festival as if he were interested.’

‘He is very handsome,’ said little Bess, who, with her arms full of flowers, had been an open-eyed spectator, never saying a word until now.

‘Nonsense!’ I cried. ‘I don’t think he’s handsome at all. A young fellow like that, with not the sign of a moustache, and hair that looks like pulled-molasses candy. A young theolog, who thinks he knows more than the Bishop—at the best a deacon, I suppose.’

‘I thought it an interesting face,’ said Flo, dropping the roses softly in Bessie’s basket.

‘You mean an interesting dress, Flo,’ I laughed. ‘An Anglican coat, a broad-brimmed hat, a white necktie—I think you’d succumb to anything that wore that. Suppose he should turn out to be a Jesuit Brother, looking around for an eligible site for a new college? I shouldn’t wonder a bit.’

‘He would begin his mission with us right away,’ said Meg. ‘He must have thought we were direct from Fiji. Look at that nose, if you please! You know I told you to wash it, Bab.’

‘My nose? I declare, I forgot! Blue as an indigo bag, I suppose, and my face red as a flamingo, in this sun. What must he think!’ as I covered up the unfor-

lunate organ, with a pair of hands that were anything but immaculate.

Who could he be, and what did he think of a young woman in disordered attire, hair blown wildly about the face, and looking like a Medusa, with dandelion stems, a blue nose, and hands that were every hue that paint, dirt, and vegetable matter could make them? The girls cut flowers a little longer while I sat in painful silence regarding my unfortunate digits, and then Flo said,

‘I wonder if he will be at church to-morrow. We must remember and look.’

‘What! the Jesuit Brother again! There don’t seem to be much danger of your forgetting him,’ I said, crossly.

‘I wouldn’t wonder if it were the new Assistant, after all,’ Nat put in.

‘O no!’ said Meg, ‘he was too young.’

‘O no!’ echoed I; ‘he is a priest just in orders, come up here to investigate our household and inquire into the characters of our servants, and see how much money he can raise on their wages for a new college. You can always tell a Brother, even if he don’t wear a cassock reaching to his very heels. I’m going ahead to warn mother.’

‘Take your time, Bab,’ advised Nat laughingly. ‘He has farther to walk around by the road than we have; beside, I noticed he went on toward the village, and you’d have your hurry for nothing.’

Flo said ‘What an absurd idea,’ and then her scissors were snipping among the rosebushes and tall geraniums again—a little faster than usual this time; the baskets were declared full, and we all walked up the gravel path, a little weary with our picnicing.

All the rest of the day we were tying bouquets and wreaths, and Flo made an exquisite shepherd's crook for the Rector's class, which was called the Sheepfold. It was three or four feet long, and from the handle to the point of the crook was one mass of scarlet and white flowers. She sent it up by Bob in the evening, with many an injunction to carry it carefully, and to tell Mrs. Leighton to put it in a cool place and keep it well sprinkled.

'Poor Flo ! she looked quite pale and tired when all the garlanding was over, and mother insisted upon her going to bed very early in order to be equal to the work of the morrow ; for Flo, without being sick, was the delicate one of our family, and father hoped everything from the change to country air for her. She looked pale enough, however, when the morning came, but insisted it was only the heat of the day before that had prostrated her. As she stood in front of the glass dressing for the festival, while the church bells chimed faintly in the distance, I thought that if I were really and truly the artist that I longed to be, I would paint her for a St. Agnes, or Cecilia, or indeed any other Saint in the calendar whose face might have been only half as pure, holy, and peaceful as hers. I wonder if I could be as restful and full of peace if I tried ever and ever so hard ; or does such rest only come to those who wait and watch and pray for the blessing ? I could wait until I were old, very old, if only it would come then. But will it ever come to *me* after all the waiting, the craving, and the pain ? Sometimes I do so long for the real inner spirit of this peace—a calm like the under current of the ocean, still and deep, and never troubled by the restless tossing of the upper water. Yes, I wish I were just like Flo.

We hurried off to church to find it half full of people, and with some difficulty were squeezed into front seats near the chancel. The first object that I saw was our friend of the day before, the Jesuit Brother, as I had called him, not in deacon's robes, but in full vestments, walk into the chancel with two other clergymen, one of whom was Mr. Leighton, of course. I stole a glance at Flo to give her warning of the approach of her destiny, but my meaning looks were all lost. Not so with Bess, however. She had knelt upon the cushion, but lifted her head, nodded, said 'There's your Jesuit!' disclosing her two even rows of white teeth, then dropped her head again in her hands as if she had been committing an enormity.

I leaned over and whispered in Flo's ear 'He's here, but, upon my word, he isn't even a deacon! Did you ever see the like of that?' But Flo only pressed my arm with a warning 'How can you, Barbara!' and then her golden head was bowed, and her pure thoughts were away with God. I saw her color up to the temples, though, when she rose from her knees, and the flush did not die away in a long time. She certainly had never looked more beautiful as she stood at the head of her long class of girls, her cheeks rosy, her eyes downcast, her face so shy, so sweet, so devout. And I saw the Jesuit Brother's eyes turn to her many a time. I think the picture was as interesting a study to him as to me, although he professed to be so deeply interested in the prayers and singing.

I never liked Sunday-school or Sunday-school children, so the festival amounted to very little with me. I went more to see who the stranger should prove to be, as well

as to show him an immaculate nose, and a pair of hands covered with pale gray kid—two buttons—Alexander's best at that. But it all went for nothing. I was perfectly convinced that he never once glanced toward the corner where I sat.

I should never be anything but a blue-nosed myth to him, that was certain.



CHAPTER VII.

MAKING AN IMPRESSION.

One morning, soon after the festival, when it was early and cool, Miss Desmond and her friend Netta Homans rode over on their pretty, long-tailed ponies, to invite us to a garden party the next day at Mrs. Desmond's. I saw them cantering down the lane, from my studio window, and drew back in time to avoid a bow, for I looked particularly awful on that morning, having hurried up stairs the instant breakfast was dispatched, to clear up and take a fresh start on a new canvas.

I ran down to inform Meg, who was rushing through our rooms like a feminine Attila, making a raid upon the dust and flies simultaneously; so Flo, as usual, was the one to walk out on the piazza, and chat with the young ladies. Everybody has his or her own particular gift, and if it was Meg's to be all smiles and sunshine, it was also Flo's to be serene and ready for any emergency. No matter what time of day any one called, she was sure to be a miracle of propriety and self-possession, in the most perfect of dainty dresses, with fresh frills at throat and wrists, and her pale yellow hair like strands of braided gold above her calm forehead. And nothing disturbed this repose and serenity. I believe it was part of her religion to be always ready. Therefore, on a busy morning, she was the one to receive a stray visitor, or do an errand in the village, when mother was in a hurry for something that didn't admit of delay, to change my dress, or Meg to smooth out her refractory hair. If I painted in my garret studio, I generally contrived to absorb an

undue amount of coloring matter, to say nothing of surplus oil and turpentine. The general feeling in the family, was one of relief, if I prudently kept out of the way during these art-frenzies, and a garret was as good a place for me to hide my shortcomings in, I argued, as a convent.

Miss Desmond delivered her invitation, to which Meg and I listened, making our remarks behind the green blinds, as we looked down upon the group. Flo accepted conditionally. There was always mother's consent to gain, for Flo clung to her little girlish ways of abiding by mother's decision in everything.

'Your sisters and your two brothers, Miss Fox,' we heard her say. 'You have two brothers, have you not?'

'As if she didn't see Nat holding our horse by the head, that first Sunday we were in church,' I whispered; whereupon Meg gave me a pinch on the arm, and said 'Do keep quiet; I can't hear a thing.'

Flo looked very pretty in her white cambric morning dress and blue necktie, as she stood on the lower step of the piazza shading her eyes with one slender hand—ever so much prettier than those fine young ladies on horseback; and I know that they thought so too, for both their faces expressed genuine admiration. They were full of bright, pleasant chat, and any one to look at the group, would not have dreamed that Flo had just stepped out from the parlor which she had carefully dusted with a pair of Nat's old gloves upon her hands, and a calico apron that she had untied and put in a closet with the gloves when she saw from the half-opened blinds the two girls, and heard the clatter of the horses' hoofs upon the gravel.

'You are changing things here somewhat,' Miss Des-

mond remarked, pointing with her riding-whip to the large circle with the white vase in the centre, and then to the not yet completed croquet ground. 'We thought of doing the same thing, only, you know, it hardly would pay, as we expected to get in our own house so soon. But this is really very pretty. Have you a good garden-er?'

'O we all did it,' laughed Flo in her unaffected way. 'My brother, of course, did the hard work, the digging and all that, but we girls took our trowels and knives and helped. I put out almost all of the plants.'

'You?' and then they looked down at Flo's white hands. 'Why, you are wonderful, really wonderful; isn't she, Netta dear? And we find absolutely nothing to do here but ride about and play croquet, and go down to the beach. We live like the Lotus eaters in Summer.'

'And we ought not to do anything of the kind,' said Miss Homans. 'Your sister Edith sets us an example, if only we were not too indolent to follow it. By the way, I think our new Assistant is going to revolutionize things, and give us all work to do. How shall you like that, Miss Fox?'

'I shall like it far more than I can express,' replied Flo. 'It seemed to me that there was a great lack of interest in the Church. You know in the city we are used to mission schools and daily services—'

'And poor old women and ragged children,' laughed Bella Desmond. 'I shall tell Edith when I go home, my dear, that she will find a valuable coadjutor in you. She has been dying to get some one to institute such a movement; and Mr. Aymer promises well, I do assure you.'

'You have met him, then?'

'Mamma would tell you that we were already the old-

est friends. She has perfectly absorbed every moment of his time since he came. But you will meet him on Wednesday, if you will consent to come to our little festa. Indeed I wouldn't wonder if mamma was making him quite the feature of the occasion. We shall hope to see you all. And now, good morning. You must pardon us for keeping you in the sun so long.'

They nodded, touched up their ponies, and cantered out of the lane.

'What will you wear, Flo?' I shouted, making a speaking trumpet of my hands, and waving Meg's duster, as soon as the two equestrians had fluttered out of sight.

'O, you're up there listening, are you? I'll come in and we'll have a consultation.'

'Yes, that's just the thing,' said Meg.

'What is there to wear? I've never been to a garden party, in all my life. I've read about them though, and know what we ought to wear—the lightest, daintest muslins, the tiniest boots, broad-brimmed hats, and plenty of flowers. Wont Flo be too lovely for anything, for she has all her things ready, just as if they were made expressly for the occasion—did you ever know another such lassie?'

Meantime Flo closed the parlor blinds, making it cool and dark, and then came up the stairs, singing softly to herself a little Scotch air, and folding her old gloves one within the other.

'What a girl you are, Flo,' I began. 'If you had just stepped out of a mantua-makers, you could not look more spotlessly neat or well-dressed. I don't see how you contrive to do it. How do you think Meg and I would have looked, if your two visitors had taken us unawares as they did you?'

‘O, I think Meg is very presentable; but it is your unfortunate love of paint and turpentine that leads you astray, my dear. If I were you, I’d have a painting dress—a sort of thing like a domino to envelope yourself in, and catch stray dabs of color.’

‘But I can’t have a shield for my nose, you know—that’s the melancholy part of it. I do wonder if that was Mr. Aymar who spoke to us over the hedge the other day.’

‘Not at all likely,’ responded Meg. ‘I think the other stranger in the chancel was he—our friend of the festival is much too young to be Mr. Leighton’s assistant.’

‘But they were both ordained priests,’ commented Flo.

‘Very true. Trying their wings for the first time, I suppose. The younger one—our friend—eyed Flo whenever a good opportunity presented, I noticed. He lost his place two or three times, and he blushed like a girl,’ said I.

‘O Barbara! I think he gave more thought to the services than to things of that sort,’ said Flo seriously.

‘Well, if it was Mr. Aymar, I only hope that he will not remember me, or if he does, that he will kindly imagine me tattooed for the occasion. I shall have to resort to some system, I suppose, if we are going to have morning calls, and meet young gentlemen in the woods or on the by-roads. This is the wilderness that we have strayed into, is it, and these the benighted heathen with whom we are to associate! I must say, living in the country is not at all what I expected it would be. But all this does not settle the question of dress; what are we to wear, do you suppose?’

We all made this appeal to mother, as we went on into her bed-room, where she sat by the window, sewing.

‘Do you think we can go, in the first place?’ asked

Flo. 'I wouldn't say positively until I had asked your permission, mother,' dropping down by her side.

Mother nodded approval with a bright smile. 'I think it will be delightful for you, girls, but I am a little afraid your dresses are not good enough. What will you wear, Meg, your blue lawn?'

'Most likely,' replied Meg. 'I haven't thought much about it yet.'

'And Flo will wear white with a blue sash, and her broad-brimmed chip hat tied with blue ribbons, and dotted with daisies,' said I, 'all as nice and fresh as if it were made for the party. What a picture you will make, Flo! But what shall I wear? I, who have nothing but a few crumpled muslins, and never was out to a party of any kind in my life.'

'You poor little Cinderella,' said Meg. 'We must lend you something. You may choose from my extensive wardrobe.'

'You may take my lavender lawn, Barbara,' said Flo.

'Or my best white gown,' interpolated Meg.

'Dear me! what a thing it is to have two grown-up sisters—Meg's too short, and Flo's too tall. I'll have to stay at home, I see clearly.'

'I think,' said mother, 'we'll have to give Barbara a new dress. You can buy you a lawn, if you like, dear, and Flo can lend you one of her pretty ribbons.'

This was a wonderful departure from established rules, for heretofore this interesting middle child had been content to wear her sisters' cast-off dresses, or exist by borrowing—not so dangerous an experiment as one might have supposed; for the only time that I was scrupulously careful, was when I indulged in borrowed finery. But Meg threw cold water on this project.

‘It can’t be done, your grace,’ she laughed ; ‘ the party comes off to-morrow. Bab will have to go in her regular character of *Aschenpüttle*, or accept my overtures.’

‘ O dear,’ I sighed, ‘ I wish that we were rich enough to have everything that we need, without borrowing and lending. However, I’ll try on the dress—it will be a mile too short.’

‘ Let it down, then,’ advised Meg. ‘ It never will show under the upper skirt. And there’s your own embroidered waist to wear. It will be lovely. And the round hat is a thing easily gotten up. Then there’s mother’s corals. It’s your turn to wear them now.’

‘ But you’ll want them,’ I said, flushing with delight at Meg’s ready advice.

‘ No, indeed ; I’m going to wear my jets, black velvet bows and sash, and tie my new white garden hat with black velvet ribbons. It will be prettier and more becoming than anything else that I can wear ; and Flo will be a beauty in all those fluted ruffles. I am glad now that I insisted upon taking them in hand myself.’

And Meg, the energetic, bustled off to her room, shook out her own dress, and gave me another, with injunctions to rip it off the band, and set to work as quickly as possible. Flo had nothing to do—she never had ; it was only Meg and I who worked our fingers metaphorically to the bone to keep ourselves from absolute disgrace, as regarded our personal adornments.

‘ I wonder what the new Rector will be like,’ I said to Meg that afternoon, as we sat in the bay window downstairs, making up our bows and plans simultaneously, while mother swayed placidly in her rocking-chair as she knitted a sock, and Flo flitted among the flower-beds

in the garden below, making up her daily bouquets for the vases in the parlor and on the tea-table.

‘He isn’t Rector yet,’ commented Meg, looping her black velvet and holding it up to catch the effect.

‘O well, as good as that. Mr. Leighton will give up everything to him now—see if he don’t; and Bella Desmond said this morning he was full of all sorts of new ideas. I hope he won’t have candles and a processional.’

Meg laughed. ‘I think Mrs. Desmond would sign articles of war right away. Beside, I don’t see who he would get to procesh,’ with a furtive glance at mother, who never tolerated the stray bits of slang we were prone to indulge in when alone. ‘I think, perhaps, he’ll give a little life and zest to parish work. That wont hurt us a bit, you know. We need it; and a little brightening up in the matter of decorations and music, will be delightful. I don’t see what they would do for music, if it were not for Miss Desmond and Flo. I don’t wonder that our advent was hailed with some degree of enthusiasm; for Flo’s voice was just the one thing they could do no longer without.’

We worked on quietly for a few minutes, while my thoughts travelled back to the arbor-vitæ hedge and the young clergyman’s face, that I had seen for one brief instant over it, while Meg went on tying up her velvet with the greatest precision. Just then Bridget appeared hurriedly in the open door.

‘The praste, mum, and Miss Desmond are here, sure. They found Miss Flo in the garden, and they’re all a comin’ up the steps.’

Down went Meg’s velvet bows—I skilfully made a ball of my muslins and threw it behind the sofa, while mother serenely folded up her knitting and went forward to

receive her guests. I had just time to put both hands to my head, and give a hurried smooth to the hair that never would lie properly, when in walked Mrs. Desmond with Flo by her side, her white apron half full of cut-flowers, and her cheeks a little flushed as she ushered the new clergyman into our morning room. One glance at him settled my doubts. Mr. Aymar and my Jesuit Brother were one and the same. I know a certain consciousness bubbled up into my eyes. I could feel them dancing, but I hurriedly gave my hand to Mrs. Desmond, who had swept up to me, overturning my work-basket with her long dress and sudden movements.

‘Let me present you to our new rector, my dear,’ she was saying, ‘a charming young man. I have been particularly struck with his ideas already—so large, so diffusive—you may depend we are to have a live parish now’—this in a stageaside—then taking the young gentleman by the arm, she said

‘Here are two more members of your congregation, Miss Fox, Miss Barbara Fox, Mr. Aymar. Do you know, young ladies, that I have been going through this form ever since breakfast. I am quite certain that he knows one-half the parish already.’

Mr. Aymar shook hands with us, said laughingly

‘I believe we have met before. It gives me an opportunity to apologize again for startling you as I did, the day before the Trinity Festival. I can only say in extenuation of my conduct, that flowers are almost a necessity with me. I was determined to have them, and I hadn’t the faintest idea to whom to apply.’

He spoke to us all, but he looked at Flo, and I added to her confusion by giving her a horrible wink as I sat down by Mrs. Desmond, who was chatting in her usual

desultory way, talking to no one in particular, but taking us all in with one comprehensive sweep of her hand and tongue. Mr. Aymer was doing the usual morning-caller-talk with Meg and Flo, and listening to small scraps of information about the parish, which Mrs. Desmond threw out once in awhile, much in the same way that one dispenses sugarplums to a petted child. From my rather obscure seat I could watch him without very much danger of his discovering me in the act. He was without a doubt young, and rather studentish looking, with brown eyes, that had a good deal of earnestness in their depths. He was not handsome, though certainly not ugly, for there was something inexpressibly winning in his face, though his manner was almost shy at times. Perhaps it was his youth, but I, who am four or five years his junior, never feel shy at all. That is the difference, however, between men and women—we certainly do age faster than men. Gauging him thus, I amused myself very coolly with looking at him, but I noticed that he turned away with some confusion whenever his eyes met mine. I am sure that I cannot endure a man who is nervous and shy as a girl of sixteen, and it is most unfortunate for a clergyman. Think of all the different people that he must be agreeable to, whether he fancies them or not! Most certainly a minister is to be pitied, and a minister's wife—that is the last position in life to which I should ever aspire; I had almost written *sink*, only I think Flo would say that was so very, very wicked—for if the office dignifies a man, perhaps it may eventually dignify even a woman. But those are things that I never like to think of; either I am above them, or they are above me. I do wonder which it is.

‘And so you are the artist of the family, your mother

tells me,' said Mrs. Desmond, turning for a moment from mother to me, and patting me on the hand. 'Now that is very nice. Do you know I adore painting? But it has its dangers as well as its charms. You know Mrs. Browning says "Art is a service." She might have added, a hard taskmaster, taking all and giving—now I am forced to say it, you know—giving sometimes absolutely nothing. There are exceptions, of course—exceptions to all rules. But, my dear, your pretty pink cheeks will be white if you coop yourself in a hot garret this lovely weather, and inhale those loathsome oils. Now really, Mrs. Fox, you must learn to be firm. With these enthusiastic natures it is the only way, positively the only way.'

There was a something in her easy familiar kindness that was just the least bit condescending and patronizing, and instead of soothing me with its sweetness, it acted like an irritant, I am sorry to say. Meg told me that I was positively brusque afterward, and I fear that I was, for I certainly responded with some asperity 'That mother had never given me over much advice upon the subject, perhaps because I had such an unfortunate habit of detesting advice.' I might have gone a little further, and said something even more offensive and rude, if Meg had not coughed appealingly, and then I caught Mr. Aymar's brown eyes fastened upon mine with irresistible laughter and surprise in their depths. I was more vexed with myself than I could express, and yet I flashed him back an angry look. What business had he, a stranger, to laugh at me and my silly little outburst? particularly as Mrs. Desmond took not the slightest notice of it, but rambled on without the least shade of annoyance on her placid face. 'Young people are all alike, and think themselves capable of judging for themselves in the most

important matters. It is just so with Isabella—the dearest child, but wilful—she can't help it, you know—she is a woman. But I lay down stringent rules, quite stringent, you know. Bella is so fond of music—clever, too, immensely clever,' in another audible aside; 'but I am firm in carrying out my plan—rides and walks, and music afterward; it is the only way, Mrs. Fox—firmness with the young people.'

She nodded her flowers two or three times good humoredly to me, and in the pause that followed I seemed to hear my impertinent words dropping like an echo. A painful blush overspread my face, but Meg came gallantly to my rescue, and began a talk about the rides around the country, and the best place to obtain a view of the sea, and Mrs. Desmond drifted back into conversation with mother and Flo.

'Do you ride, Miss Fox?' asked Mr. Aymar, speaking to me for the first time.

'I know very little about riding,' I replied, 'but I drive an old superannuated horse and phaeton that looks as if it had come in with the Flood. I enjoy that immensely. If you chance to meet such an apparition, you will be able to tell who it is.'

'I can do that very easily,' he said smilingly, 'for I have met you once before, you know—that is, twice before.'

'No; only once,' I said, my cheeks flushing a little at the remembrance. 'I may as well tell you that I don't often go about the country tattooed like a savage.'

'You mean the time that I saw you over the hedge; but I met you once before that, with your little sister, in the old churchyard. You had evidently found something

very interesting as well as amusing to entertain yourselves with.'

In the churchyard? Yes, I knew I had seen those brown eyes before. To-day they had been bent upon me full of laughter, but in the churchyard they had looked into mine gravely and disapprovingly.

A very disagreeable young man, I inwardly commented; a young man that in spite of his apparent shyness had eyes to see everything, and remember it too. I should never be able to tolerate him, that was certain.

'Bess and I were amusing ourselves with the old inscriptions,' I said coldly; and then Mrs. Desmond and Flo began discussing a new book. It was an English work, and brought up some strong points in Ritual, I believe. I shrugged my shoulders, and asked Mr. Aymar if he had seen it. He had, upon Mrs. Desmond's table, where all the new books, I fancy, found their way; but he had so little time for reading; and then he asked me if I shared my sister's tastes, and liked solid or serious reading.

'I like novels,' I said; 'though I'm not sure that I ought to confess it to you.'

'And why not, pray?' he returned quickly. 'Don't you approve of truthful answers, Miss Fox?'

I said 'Yes,' as I told him that he would probably condemn me for indulging in romances, and that I did not like poetry at all.

'You are saying that to shock me,' he answered; 'but I shall give you a compliment instead. Macaulay tells us that one can neither read nor write poetry without a certain unsoundness of mind. Perhaps you are aware of that fact, and say so just to make yourself seem superior.'

Very young ladies. are generally so fond of poetry, that you seem an exception to established rules.'

I fancied there was a little mockery in his voice ; indeed I had a feeling all the time that he was laughing at me, ever since my unlucky speech to Mrs. Desmond, and I disliked him more than ever. Very young ladies, indeed ! and here had I been pitying him for his youth and shyness ! I was so disposed to quarrel with him that my only safety, I felt, was in utter silence ; and he went on :

'I have Mrs. Desmond's statements to help me out of any little difficulty. She was only a moment ago, you will remember, commenting upon the wilfulness of young ladies.'

'She might with more truth have commented upon their impertinence,' I replied, resolving to appear amiable, if possible, for Mrs. Desmond had risen and was making her adieus. 'I am ashamed of myself for having spoken so hastily to her.'

'Indeed ? To be sensible of an error is the next best thing to noncommittal of it,' and this time his eyes were earnest and his face grave.

I gave him my hand very quietly, with a 'Thank you' that I did not feel in the least—I am sure I had much rather have given him my honest opinion ; and then I began a speech of contrition to Mrs. Desmond, who smiled, patted my hand again, hoped to see me at the little croquet party on the morrow, and shaking her finger warningly, said 'I shall always condemn your working in oils in warm weather. One is so apt to become absorbed, you know.' She had cantered at a break-neck pace through the parish to mother, telling her who were eligible acquaintances and who were not, discussing the

comparative attractions of city and country, and gracefully giving precedence to the latter, together with a glowing rhapsody on Church and State; and now she had shaken hands all around, taken Mr. Aymar's arm and ambled out at a nice little trot to the carriage, commenting upon the river, the dear old house, Uncle Jane-way, and rural delights, in one breath.

We all gave a sigh of relief when she had gone, and I ejaculated heartily 'I feel as if I had just gotten over an attack of neuralgia! I am sure if I were to see much of Mrs. Desmond, I should go to an insane asylum for the rest of my natural existence.'

'I think I shall put you there anyway, Barbara,' said mother quietly, 'if I ever hear you making such pert replies as I heard this morning.'

This was as much of a reproof as I ever needed from mother. I went up to her and put my arms around her neck in an instant.

'I am going to be as good as I can be after this, to make up for my shortcomings,' I said, 'but I may confess to you privately one thing, mayn't I, mother dear? I cannot endure Mr. Aymar. He is the very last man on earth to be a clergyman. He is nothing but a school boy, and a very silly one at that.'

'I thought him very intelligent,' said Flo, 'rather retiring, but earnest and practical. I am quite certain that he is the very man for this parish.'

'And his eyes!' ejaculated Meg, as she picked up her velvet bows, 'now confess, Bab, that his eyes are fine.'

'Not different from a thousand other brown eyes that I have seen,' I replied.

And then to prove Mrs. Desmond's words true, out of

very wilfulness, I went up into my studio and painted all the rest of the day.

But I found that Mr. Aymar's eyes were very different from the thousand others that I had seen,—the peculiarity about them was that I could not get rid of them even after he was gone. The eyes, or the remembrance of them, stayed by me oddly. I saw them looking into mine continually—now grave and serious, now flashing with sudden mirth. Yes, he had been longing to laugh at me—and I—I was the one that had been silly and ignorant—I did not know that he had been laughing at me all the time with those wonderful brown eyes, though his face was gravity itself. I feared that he had been weighing me and labelling me at my value,—my value, indeed! Just for the oddity of the thing, I would like to find out for myself what that value might be.



CHAPTER VIII.

THE GARDEN PARTY.

It was lovely weather for croquet ; not a cloud in the sky, and not a breath of air to displace our garden hats or to dishevel our tresses. We all looked well—mother said we did, and that was quite praise enough for anybody. We tucked our crisp muslins about us and sat at prim distances on the wide seat of the family ark, not daring to lean back, lest by so doing we should crush our fluted ruffles ; but we chatted and laughed and had our usual amount of family fun, all by ourselves, as Bob drove us to the Desmond's gate. There Nat helped us out, Bob gave us a parting grimace, and we opened the white gate, standing there a moment to shake our flouncings out, and see that everything was right. Meg had one last word of advice for me.

'You look well, Bab, my dear ; only behave as well as you look, and you'll do. Don't talk in that positive way of yours. Try and be quiet and easy. Look at Flo and see how she does things.'

'Look at Flo, indeed !' I laughed. 'And much good would it do me. I've been looking at her ever since I was born, and it's my belief that the gulf widens between us, every day. I must just be myself, Meg, and if people don't like me, I'll have to bear it as well as I can.'

'Don't be silly,' said Meg, jerking my sash into place, and looking me all over once more. 'And remember not to make remarks about anybody.'

'Look at me once in awhile, and if you see me doing anything out of the way, just wink,' said I.

‘Wink, indeed ! I shall do nothing of the kind. I’ll cough.’

‘Very good,’ retorted I. ‘But you’ll throw yourself into a consumption yet, with that cough of yours, and I don’t see that I behave very much better because of it.’

‘That is because you don’t try.’

‘There, that will do,’ said Nat. ‘If you give Bab any more advice she’ll sit like a trussed fowl all the evening. I think it would be better to be natural, even if one isn’t quite as agreeable.’

‘Decidedly,’ said Flo quietly, and with this little snubbing all around, we walked up the gravelled path, under the spreading green trees, catching glimpses of white dresses and bright colored sashes flitting across the lawn and on the piazza. Mr. Aymer and Miss Desmond were a little apart from the others—Mr. Aymer striking the last wicket in its place, while she aimlessly knocked the gay balls about.

‘She has the priest all to herself,’ I whispered to Flo, as we walked across the lawn to meet them. ‘That is the charm of having a young man settled over one. The whole unmarried population are drawing cuts for him. It’s great fun.’

‘I don’t think it will be such particularly good fun with Mr. Aymer,’ said Flo. ‘I think he seems to be far more engaged with his parish and his poor, than with the young ladies.’

‘I should like to know what he is doing now if he isn’t flirting,’ I said, as I saw him drop on one knee to drive a hoop more securely. ‘They have been talking there alone in a most absorbed manner, ever since we came in sight of the house.’

‘It doesn’t follow that it is a flirtation,’ said Meg.

'They may be planning red-flannel garments for superannuated fishermen's wives, for aught we know to the contrary.'

'It looks uncommonly like it,' I responded, and then hearing our footsteps, they both turned around and strolled toward us, Mr. Aymar taking off his hat and making us a profound bow.

Miss Desmond laid her hand pleasantly on Meg's arm, after our greetings had been exchanged, walking between her and Nat to the house. Mr. Aymar dropped behind to accompany us, and talked in a grave ordinary tone of the weather, the promise of fine croquet, and then drifted casually into Church matters, as if that was really the only thing a clergyman was expected to be chatty about.

I didn't like it. We had come for croquet, not for a sermon. We had plenty of the latter, with the changed services and abundant work laid upon each one's shoulders, but Flo entered into all his ideas at once, and looked at him as he talked as if he were truly what Mrs. Desmond had called him, 'A young John crying in the wilderness.'

I was perfectly certain that I should not like him, and if every one in the parish was expected to greet him with a kind of rapture, it would be just as well to balance the thing with a little disrespect and snubbing on my part. I edged away from him as soon as we entered the hall, and crowded up close to Nat's brotherly elbow. We laid our hats upon the hall table without going up stairs to pretend to arrange our hair or dress, and then walked in the drawing-room to be presented to Mrs. Desmond. She was lounging in a capacious chair, toying with her gold eye-glasses, using them, as it were, more to point her re-

marks than assist her vision, when she saw us and started up, coming toward us with both hands outstretched: 'I am very glad that you took all the trouble to come to the children's little gathering,' she said cordially. She was always calling them children, as if they were just out of the nursery. 'I am happy, Mr. Fox, to meet you,' bowing over Nat's hand as if the act conferred a patent of nobility. 'And why did not your other brother come?'

'My brother feels his youth keenly,' said Meg smiling. 'He is at that unfortunate age when he hardly knows where to place himself.'

'Something like Mahomet's coffin,' I said laughing, 'a between heaven and earth position—one don't know his proper sphere. I think no age quite so pitiable for a boy as seventeen.'

'My dear, you may depend upon it,' retaining my hand in hers for a moment, 'that when the figures are reversed, it is still more pitiable. Seventeen is lovely, but seventy-one despairing!'

She laughed, swept us up to the group of ladies and gentlemen she had been talking with when we came in, and then retreated to repeat the same welcome to a fresh arrival. She looked very charming in a tasteful silk and little lace cap with delicate pink bows, not too much dressed, but matronly and elegant, though it was modelled, I could see, after her 'sweetly simple' style. I liked to look at her and watch her talk in her animated, desultory way, going from one subject to another as if it were not the slightest consequence what it was, she being quite equal to any emergency. I didn't understand it. I could get along so much better with the daughters, who never descended to their mother's petty flatteries

and condescending familiarity. Without stopping to reflect where I was, I leaned over, pinching Nat's arm and whispering in his ear, 'Isn't it too absurd to watch Mrs. Desmond? How can she pretend to like everybody? And she says the same thing over and over to each one as they come in—I dare say they are flattered, but I know she can't be charmed with them all. It isn't in the nature of things, and what a sham she is making out of life.'

'It is very refreshing in these days to hear the truth,' came the reply, in a cool, clear tone of voice; and taking my hand off the broadcloth sleeve, I saw with horror, not Nat's face, but that of a tall fair-haired stranger looking down into mine.

'O I beg pardon,' I stammered, 'I thought it was my brother. What have I done! And what will Meg say to me!'

'Commend you for your truthfulness, undoubtedly. Is Meg your governess, may I ask?'

'She is my sister,' I said, my cheeks crimsoning with vexation. 'And she will never forgive me.'

'Then I will be more magnanimous,' he replied with a low bow. 'I shall endeavor to forget that you have spoken so disrespectfully of my poor aunt.'

'Your aunt?' I dropped back into a low seat, half-hidden by the lace curtain, and tried to recover from the dreadful shock; and I think my companion, out of pure pity, would have followed me, but just then Mrs. Desmond carried him off, to introduce him to a new comer, and I was left alone to swallow my mortification. If the floor had kindly opened and taken me in, I think I should have been grateful. What an idiot I was not to remember Meg's advice, and why wasn't she on the spot to

cough ? But after a few moments I began to feel a little better. There were so many extenuating circumstances, now that I sat and thought it over coolly. In the first place the blue eyes that met mine were absolutely dancing with laughter—if Mrs. Desmond was his aunt, he surely was not offended—then he was young, not very much older than Nat, I should say—he would be sure to feel for me, a stranger and young, like himself—and he was unmistakably a gentleman. He would not mention my imprudent words to any one, he might even have the grace to forget them, but it gave me such a shock that I was quite content to sit alone for some time and watch the company, listen to the tone of conversation, and admire the room.

The walls were a trifle low perhaps to one accustomed to city houses, but here in the country the effect was pleasing. There was a deep bay window at one end, and at the other two long glass-doors opened upon a wide, vine-covered verandah. There were two more windows at the side, and those also opened upon a porch, where broad-cushioned seats were placed—the very spot to lead one into lounging and idleness. The tables were loaded with books and all sorts of pretty trumpery, and the piano, a parlor grand, was opened and covered with new music. In the niches stood vases filled with long waving ferns, and under the mirrors baskets of flowers were standing. On the walls hung beautiful pictures—pictures that made my fingers tingle, I wanted so to get at them and examine them ; but Meg, turning over a folio of prints with Mr. Homans, warned me by a glance not to begin that sort of thing, and I gloomily refrained, resolving to obey her slightest nod after this. She seemed perfectly at ease with the grave Mr. Homans, talking to him as nat-

urally and unaffectedly as if she had been in society all her life. Nat, I could see, was playing the agreeable to a young lady in pink lawn, and here was I, alone in a corner, frightened to death, and making a miserable blunder the first thing—laughing about our hostess, right under her very eyes as it were. What would become of me if I went on doing such things? I certainly had always been the Jonah of the family, from the moment that I was old enough to set up an independent line of thought and action. And the worst of it was, there was always a whale waiting for me; I never, by any chance, missed that part of it.

I think the younger Miss Desmond pitied me, for presently she came over to where I sat, bringing Netta Homans with her.

I liked both of the girls, though I felt a little shy of them at first, as I looked at their beautiful dresses, which though they were only of white organdie, were trimmed with exquisite lace, and their jaunty garden hats were tied over the most elaborately gotten up hair dressing that I had ever seen, I felt so simply dressed by the side of them; but I was proud when I looked across at Flo, with her calm, serene face, her clouds of yellow hair banded loosely above her forehead, and her white hands linked carelessly together as she talked with Mrs. Desmond and Mr. Aymar. If Flo had worn her morning cambric she would have looked just as stately, I thought with a thrill of pleasure. And then nothing moves her from that repose of manner which is so elegant and lady-like. I could see that if I had not made any impression, Flo had, for Miss Homans began the conversation at once with a compliment.

‘Do you know that we all think your sister so charm-

ing, Miss Barbara? Mr. Huntington said she looked like the pictured Madonna in the great Cathedral at Milan, but to me she seems more like a beautiful statue of St. Agnes, or some other saint,' she said with a little laugh. 'She must be sure to be some saint—no other character would suit her.'

'Yes,' I said, with a flush of pride, 'I always think of her in that way; only I've never been abroad to see any fine pictures, and so cannot institute comparisons. I am content to take her as our saint.'

She laughed again and nodded. 'I am rather afraid of good people usually,' she went on, 'they are apt to assume so much, and make a barricade of their pet opinions, but I am attracted to Miss Flo in an unaccountable way; I am sure that we shall be great friends, and there is nothing like croquet to make people fraternize. I am going to ask her to join our side, and wont you play with Bella and Mr. Huntington? I saw you talking to him when you first came in, so I know that you are acquainted.'

So my new friend's name was Huntington, was it. I was glad to find out even that about him. I rose with alacrity to tie on my hat—an airy little fabrication of Meg's, a mass of lace, daisies, and grasses, and then we all went out on the lawn together, which was already dotted with groups of prettily dressed ladies, and a proportionate amount of black coats and white waistcoats. Mr. Aymer and Flo were choosing colors; we took sides, and the game opened with a brilliant stroke from Miss Homans. Mr. Aymer showed that he too understood the art of wielding the mallet, and I who had always been accounted a famous player at home, determined to do my best here. I followed Miss Homans, going through

wicket after wicket as easily as if it were the merest bagatelle to win, and coming out as rover, the first one, when I noticed Mr. Huntington following me. I was horribly afraid of him, after the unfortunate mistake I had made, and felt decidedly nervous and shy, but his gaiety was infectious, and I began to be a little more at ease, as we strayed away from the others, he following me closely, and chatting all the time as gaily as if we were the oldest friends.

Suddenly summoning up courage, I begged him, as a particular favor, not to mention my imprudent observation to his aunt.

‘O, I have already told her,’ he said. ‘I am sorry enough since you did not wish it.’

‘Did not wish it!’ I echoed in dismay, and with a sudden burst of anger throwing down my mallet. ‘How could you think of such a thing? I cannot stay—I will go home at once—I shall never dare look her in the face again!’

‘O she thought it charming, positively charming, you know? So truthful, so sweetly simple.’ And he copied Mrs. Desmond’s tone so exactly, that I felt like laughing, although I moved indignantly away.

‘Perhaps she never said anything of the kind,’ he began, running after me as I walked quickly across the lawn. ‘Come to think of it, I don’t believe that I told her—I really make so many mistakes.’

‘You have made a very serious one this time,’ I said haughtily, ‘in offering me such direct impertinence,’ and I walked on, he striving to keep up with me, his mallet slung over his shoulder and his straw hat pushed back on his thick curls.

‘I ask ten thousand pardons, Miss Barbara,’ he began

most humbly, 'I—I hardly know how to express my penitence.'

I looked up in his face, saw his blue eyes twinkling, and his mouth gravely drawn down to repress a smile. I was more indignant than ever, but before I could say a word Miss Desmond hurried after us, calling out 'We are waiting for your play, Miss Barbara. Did you think the game ended, that you and Mr. Huntington were walking away at such a furious rate?'

'The game? O I beg pardon,' and I turned back. I noticed that she called my companion Mr. Huntington, and he with a ready grace had taken off his hat to make her a low bow.

'At least you have not forgotten your manners with your cousin,' I said tartly, as I stepped back to his side a moment. 'It is so pleasant to think there are circumstances in life when you can be a gentleman.'

He started. 'My cousin? O you mean Miss Desmond—why, she is not my cousin at all—the relationship exists solely between her mother and me.'

I stood still a moment, wondering what he meant,—if it was a spirit of badinage that seemed as natural to him as breathing, or simply disrespect. I had a consciousness amounting to almost certainty that he was laughing at me slyly in his sleeve. The color came into my cheeks at the bare thought. What should I do? Nothing, Meg would advise, I was sure. I had done too much already; so I finished my game without as much as a glance at Mr. Huntington, and having won my laurel, I walked away, longing to be alone. So far the day had been full of mortification to me. I wanted to hunt Meg up and tell her the whole thing, and beg to know if I had made

myself very ridiculous, when Mr. Huntington came up to me again.

‘You must not go away until you have forgiven me,’ he said. ‘I am just like a school-boy on a vacation, down here, and the impulse of mischief is irresistible. I have been so rude that I can only sue for forgiveness, not claiming it as a right. I am a beggar before you, Miss Barbara,—you will not say me nay.’

This time he was in earnest. I muttered something in which he was just able to distinguish ‘It is of no consequence—pray do not mention it again’; and then Mr. Homans took Miss Desmond and me to have a trial at archery, my spirits rising a little when I was fairly rid of Mr. Huntington.

Once while we were resting under the trees I said carelessly to my companion ‘Was it Mr. Huntington with whom I was playing croquet? One is so apt to get names confused when one meets so many strangers.’

‘Yes,’ she replied. ‘He is a friend, or rather an acquaintance of Mr. Aymar. He is down here now with his yacht for a few weeks’ pleasure, I believe. Mamma used to know his friends in the city, but we have never met him until to-day. I think him very agreeable.’

‘Very impertinent,’ I inwardly commented, but this time I prudently kept my thoughts to myself, though I was amazed at the young gentleman’s assurance. Mrs. Desmond his aunt!—of course he had been making fun of me all the time.

By and by I strayed into the cool drawing room, where, finding it full of strangers, and realizing for the first time that one is never so entirely alone as in a crowd, I took to examining the pictures furtively; after a little, as no one seemed to notice me, I rolled my chair before an

easel on which was standing an exquisite copy of the Siballa Lamia. It was a pleasure that I had not expected to enjoy, and I had it all to myself for some time, when a laughing voice said, close to my elbow, 'I hope you have dreamed a long enough dream over that wretched old picture. I have been looking at you for nearly ten minutes steadily, trying to find out for myself if there is such a thing as soul recognition, or affinity,—that sort of electric flash by which one recognizes a kindred spirit, you know.'

'I could have told you in less time than that,' I said without turning around.

'I hope devoutly that your study was as interesting as mine,' he went on.

'I love good pictures,' I replied gravely, as my new found friend dropped into the velvet chair at my side.

'And this is a very good one, I am told. I never state these things upon my own belief. I have a morbid horror of being considered a connoisseur in anything. Pray how did you succeed with the arrows? I have not had a glimpse of you since you so cruelly broke up our croquet.'

'I did not break up the game,' I answered. 'You will please remember that I came off victorious.'

'But you would only play the one game.'

'You know the reason very well,' I said tartly. 'And I asked Miss Desmond about you,—she never met you, you know, until to-day. And you have been laughing in your sleeve to think how you humbugged me,—is that what you call society manners?'

'You are longing to quarrel again, and I am doing my best to atone for my misconduct. I hardly call that fair.'

It is pursuing a disadvantage. I believe in giving every one a chance.'

'By all means. You shall have yours. Begin the proper style of conversation at once.'

He ran his fingers through his hair and said in a sepulchral voice,

'Charming evening, Miss.'

'Very,' I replied shortly.

'O is that all you have to say? Most young ladies would prolong the reply to such a highly original remark. It admits of endless ramifications, and is hydra-headed as an old fashioned sermon. We shall never get on unless you are more diffusive.'

'I never imagined we should get on at all,' I replied.

'You are doing better,' he commended. 'Anything but a conversation in monosyllables. It is a lovely evening, is it not?'

'You said that once before.

'No, I said it was charming. Are you enjoying yourself this evening?'

'I cannot say that I am,' and this time I indulged in a half smile. 'I think so far it has been wretchedly stupid.'

'Well, all these things are more or less heavy,' with a comprehensive wave of his hand, including everybody and everything, except the bay window where we two indolently sat. 'But, upon the whole, I find country people better than I expected. I wouldn't dare say this to you if I had not been informed you were fresh from the city, you know. And you like pictures too. Now really, this looks almost pretty enough to be a picture.'

The long drawing room had been gradually filling while we had been talking. The servants stepped noiselessly

around, lighting the tall wax candles in the candelabra and tipping the chandeliers with flame, while others were serving dainty cakes and ices on silver trays. It was indeed a pretty picture, and one the like of which I had never seen before. The rooms were delightfully cool after the heat of the garden, and every window was open to the beautiful mid-Summer night. There were about as many flowers in the drawing room as in the beds outside, and the many tapers twinkled with a subdued radiance in the long mirrors, and on the shining furniture. Mrs. Desmond flitted from one guest to the other, all smiles and pleasant words, but neither my companion or I spoke of her again. He did not show the least disposition to leave me, and so after a time I gave up being rude to him.

There is no age like sixteen for throwing aside care and making the most of a pleasure. We drifted step by step into idle chat and jest, commenting with perfect audacity upon the crowd about us, Mr. Huntington leading me on until I was almost aghast at my own boldness. Now that I had overcome my first feeling of vexation, I could look up at him sometimes as we talked, and saw that he was indeed quite young, with blonde hair of the latest and most approved style of coloring, and an incipient moustache just making pretensions to notice upon his upper lip. I had lost all sense of shyness, and had entirely forgotten that I wore one of Meg's dresses, which had been made a proper length by much piecing out at the top. Those are the bits of concealment in our lives—girls' lives—full of such paltry nothings, such endless gorings and turnings of back breadths—setting on a bit of trimming to hide a piece, cleaning and furbishing up of ribbons and gloves. For some people life must be one

long makeshift to keep up appearances. I wonder if it isn't so with all of us, just to make the one garment 'white and pure,' which we may all wear one day, if we are counted worthy, seem infinitely more beautiful and unlike any raiment of earthly fashioning. It is a comfort to think that some time all this endless worry of dress must end. And yet, though this one sober thought flitted through my mind, it was gone in an instant, and I leaned back in my chair, sipping chocolate from a tiny cup as I bandied jests with my new acquaintance.

Opposite me, under one of the chandeliers, Flo sat tranquilly, with her golden hair resting against the pale blue satin of the chair, her eyelids drooping over her violet eyes, her hands dropped lightly in her lap, and her whole face and attitude suggestive of the most perfect repose.

'What a crowd she has here to-night,' said my companion. 'I love to look at people and watch their faces, only, from our seat, it all looks like a pantomime gotten up for our especial benefit. I'd much rather hear some of the remarks. Just look at Mr. Aymar. How slowly he eats, and how he rolls up his eyes at that pretty girl in blue ribbons. Now there's a case of love at first sight. That's the beautiful Miss Flo that we played croquet with, isn't it?'

'Yes,' I said, 'that's Flo, my sister,' my cheeks crimsoning with pleasure. 'Isn't she lovely?—and of course she is entertaining a clergyman—that's what she always does, only this one looks too unsophisticated and youthful to waste one's time over.'

'O, Aymar's a good fellow enough,' said my new friend carelessly, 'a trifle young, but we can't all be old and dignified at one stride, you know,' stroking the blonde

down of his upper lip affectionately. 'Do you dance? I presume they will begin the German soon. But perhaps they don't dance, down here.'

'I don't know,' I said. 'I never saw the German, and I don't know anything about the fashion. This is my first party, you will please remember. I suppose you will say now that I am the one to be called unsophisticated.'

Just then the moon glided up over the tops of the trees, and sent a shaft of light through the vine-covered trellis where we sat. Stealthily as a thief in the night, the pale shadowy fingers of the ghostly moonlight grasped the delicate vines, touching them here and there with little patches of quivering color, weaving out of them, as it were, a ladder upon which to climb and peep in upon the pretty scene, trying to see what a garden party, when daylight was over, might turn out to be.

'Since you do not dance, will you come into the garden, Maud?' Mr. Huntington said with an elaborate bow, and drawing my arm within his own we went out together into the moon-lit night. On the grass-plat we overtook two or three couples taking the same direction we were, down to the rustic seats overlooking the bay. Flo and Mr. Aymar were among them. She had her white shawl wrapped about her throat, and looked more like a beautiful spirit than ever, so Mr. Huntington said. They were talking very earnestly, and as they paced slowly by us I heard him say gravely, 'Every word that He spoke to those Hebrew men and women of old, He repeats to us to-day. It is like trying to work out a problem for ourselves. If we fail God lets us take the key, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life." We may go through theory after theory, and lose ourselves in a fog

of speculation and doubt, but we can always find the key if we come back to His Own Word. That is the beauty of it all—the unchangeableness—it is an attribute so wholly God's—"the same yesterday, to-day, and forever".'

'Then it is not like working out a problem,' said Flo softly. 'We hold the key from the very beginning.'

They passed slowly out of sight under the trees, while we sat down and watched the light shimmer and fade over the water, and lose itself finally in the soft mists that enclosed it. I do not think that we talked quite as much nonsense as we did at first. The quiet of the evening, and Flo's grave conversation with Mr. Aymar, had subdued us; yet we were only two children after all, out on a holiday for the first time in our lives—what sensible thing could be expected of either of us? I found out that his name was Neal, that he had never been in any business in his life, and that he was here, not to visit Mr. Aymar, but to cruise around in his yacht, and make out the veriest idling expedition in the world.

We staid out there under the trees talking just as easily as if we two had a hundred ideas in common, and were the oldest friends imaginable—we who had never met until to-day—until Nat and Meg came in search of us, exclaiming at the lateness of the hour. Mr. Aymar and Flo were with them, and we followed after, strolling leisurely along through the winding garden path, saying good-night to the Desmonds in the long hall, then straying out again with a goodly crowd of young people, who all seemed to be making their adieus in detachments. Mr. Huntington and I walked on in front, with Meg, Nat, Mr. Aymar, and Flo bringing up the rear, walked arm in arm along the pleasant road-side, under the dark old trees,

with the moon still shining over the level landscape and glorifying everything in its calm and mellow light. We talked as we had begun from the very first—not in the low, rapt way that Mr. Aymer and Flo were talking, but with that easy, jesting, common-place pleasantry, that seems to bound the conversation of the young.

‘I say, Aymer,’ said my new friend as we all lingered together for a moment at the gate, ‘walk part of the way home with me, for it’s too lovely a night by far to think of wasting it in sleep. I’m good for a couple of miles yet, and I’ve two cigars left in my case. By the way, Miss Barbara, I’ve been dying to light a match for the last half-hour. See what you have to answer for!’

Before I could reply, Mr. Aymer said in a very stately way that he never smoked.

‘O by Jove! that’s no excuse,’ responded the irrepressible Neal, ‘you can walk all the same,’ and he drew the young clergyman’s arm within his own.

I expected another disclaimer, but Mr. Aymer laughingly said ‘Very well,’ and then both gentlemen took off their hats, made profound bows, and turned away.

‘I am going to make Mr. Aymer my confessor, to-night,’ whispered Mr. Huntington. ‘Shall I tell him all your delinquencies of the evening, Miss Barbara? He is a relative, too. Your imprudent conversation will make a great stir in the community.’

‘You will tell him nothing of the kind,’ I retorted, and then I caught Meg’s arm as we walked slowly up the walk.

Meg made only one remark to me before I went to bed. She was too tired and sleepy to say anything sensible, she admitted, but ‘You made an impression, Bab, my love, in your borrowed finery; a decided impression, I should say, only I want to hear all about it in the morning. I

have played croquet until I am a mere wreck of Meg Fox. Mooning about under the trees, left you decidedly fresh, I should say.'

And Meg dropped off into sleep, while I followed more leisurely, waking up once or twice in a sort of fright at finding myself face to face with Mrs. Desmond, while Mr. Aymar in a black silk gown was acting as arbiter between us.



CHAPTER IX.

LONGINGS.

The next morning we all dropped in at breakfast, one after the other, I, laggard that I was, bringing up the rear.

'Come here,' said father, putting out his arms for a morning kiss, 'and tell me all about your first party, my dear. How did you enjoy it?'

'It was a little dull at first, and I was shy, but all that passed away, and after a time I felt as if I had always been out in company.' And then we all began talking at once, after the usual family fashion.

'I thought it lovely,' said Meg. 'I never played so many games of croquet in my life.'

'Dear me!' chimed in Bess, 'I wish I were old enough to go out too.'

'I thought I had a lucky escape,' said Bob, attacking breakfast with a vigor that was lacking in the other members of the family.

'O if you had gone you would have liked it as much as I did,' I said. 'Everybody looked so pretty—there was a great deal of dress, and the house and grounds are just elegant. And we, of course, were so fascinating. I dare say all the strangers took us at our very best, and pronounced us a lovely family.'

'I've no doubt of it,' agreed Nat. 'It was really a very pretty *festa* on the whole—effective enough to suit even Mrs. Desmond. There was croquet on the lawn, and a sort of bower fitted up for archery, and ices and cakes were served at little tables on the piazza, in the garden,

under the trees, and in the drawing-room as well. And flowers and ferns were waving everywhere, and we had the latest books and prints to look over, and music—very good music too; but I thought Flo's singing quite equal to anything that was offered in that line.'

'And whom did you play croquet with, Meg?' said mother with a pleased smile.

'Ah! whom did I not play with, you had better ask. I feel as if I knew the whole world now. It is quite true—you need not laugh. Mrs. Desmond introduced us in a general sort of way to everybody, and we all felt acquainted in a moment. Bab may laugh at Mrs. Desmond, but she is the very person to give company. One feels at ease at once.'

'I wonder how mother would look,' said I, 'all trigged out in a little lace cap, her ribbons and flouncings flying out like so many banners, saying the same nonsensical compliments over and over again.'

'O she'd look dreadful!' interrupted Meg, holding up both hands; 'don't conjure up such an absurd vision. I can't think of mother in any other way than in a soft grey or black gown—it must always be some soft material; a rustling silk would work a complete metamorphosis—and then I don't know—I think I like best the nice white apron and the matronly cap, that isn't quite a cap nor yet a head-dress, but a something between the two, that makes it just mother's, and nobody else's—don't you, father?'

'I don't think anything about it, I know,' said father conclusively. 'It wouldn't do for mother to be anything but mother, for me.'

'Or for any of us,' cried Bob.

'But she would look just as beautiful in a soft grey

silk, or a rich black,' said Meg. 'I don't think it is wicked to be proud of one's mother, particularly when she happens to be the dearest little lady alive. I think she is just lovely, sitting here with her husband and her six hopefuls around her; but I looked at Mrs. Desmond last night and I did wish mother could have things and do things like the rest of the world.'

'I think mother is contented with her lot just as it is,' said father; 'aren't you, Nelly?'

And mother said 'Yes, Jim,' in that settled, quiet way of hers, as she poured coffee in the delicate china cups, laughing a little at her children's folly—a pleasant, motherly laugh—all the comfort and peace in the world bubbled up into it.

'I didn't want you in anybody's place,' said Flo. 'I was glad all the time to think of you just as you are.'

'O if we had to take Mrs. Desmond along with the silk dresses and fine things, that would end the matter at once,' I concluded. 'I couldn't think of anything but a fishing smack in a high sea, every sail set and streamers flying, when she went courtesying about among the crowd—and it was too funny if one only caught scraps of the conversation. She is just like a character in a novel.'

'Nonsense,' said Nat. 'She doesn't say sensible things enough to put in a book.'

'But all books are not sensible, Nat, my son.'

'Nor all women,' added father.

'That reminds me,' I said, dropping my voice, 'do tell me, Flo, how you liked Mr. Aymar. Is he very solemn and awful?'

'Neither one nor the other. He is a very agreeable young man. Earnest—'

'O yes,' I interrupted, 'earnest enough. I heard you

and he talking in the most solemn strain—it must have been fearfully stupid.’

‘No, no,’ said Flo, ‘anything but stupid. For one thing we were arranging for the new school. Edith Desmond is going to carry out her plan of a mission among the fishermen’s children. She and I are going to see if we cannot get up a little interest among them.’

‘O I dare say they’ll be interested in you, Flo, at all odds. You don’t know how pretty you were last night.’

But Flo put her hand over my lips: ‘Don’t talk so, Barbara. How you did rattle on last night, as if you were possessed by some mischievous spirit. And this Mr. Huntington, who is he?’

‘A relation of half the country-side, if one were to believe his statements. Candidly, I haven’t the faintest idea who he is, only that he must be strictly the thing, since Mrs. Desmond introduces him. But what audacity! Meg, did you notice how he said “Aymar,” and “By Jove,” and offered him cigars?’

‘It’s no sin to smoke,’ said Nat.

‘Very true,’ rejoined Flo, ‘but he treated Mr. Aymar with but little of the dignity and respect due his profession. I can’t say I admired his manners, and yet when I talked with him at croquet, I liked him very much.’

‘So did I,’ chimed in Meg.

‘And I was with him more than either of you,’ said I, ‘and I cannot endure the sight of him.’

‘Rather strong language,’ said father, ‘for my little girl. Who are you talking about, pray?’

‘O that wretched Mr. Huntington,’ I said rather tartly, for I had ‘come to bury Cæsar, not to praise him.’

‘You managed to flirt ridiculously with that wretched Mr. Huntington, I happened to notice,’ said Meg.

‘O I had to do something. He was so insufferably rude the first part of the evening.’

‘Well, that is a new reason for a flirtation. I supposed that people always chose agreeable subjects to practice upon.’

‘Is that the reason Flo had so much to say to Mr. Ay-mar?’

‘Mr. Ay-mar?’ and Flo’s cheeks were tinged with just the faintest rose, ‘he was agreeable and courteous, but very grave for a young man. I don’t believe he thought of anything so idle as a flirtation, and I am very sure that I did not.’

‘I am glad then that one person could be sensible. I never felt more insulted in my life than with Mr. Huntington’s silly jokes.’

‘What were they?’ asked Nat, flaring up.

‘O nothing, very much; only I felt like a fool. He thinks Flo a perfect beauty.’

‘You needn’t have felt like a fool about that,’ said Nat. ‘I think he has uncommon good taste.’

‘O it wasn’t that,’ I replied a little snappishly; ‘it was ever and ever so much before that. I don’t like him, and I am quite certain that I shall never have anything to say to him again.’

‘A very Barbarous conclusion,’ spoke up Bob. ‘I had hoped, Barbara, my love, that for once in your life you would find out the true meaning of the word felicity—to say nothing of making an impression in your borrowed clothes.’

‘Ah, Bobby!’ whispered I, ‘for once in my life I’ve met somebody worse than you. I shall never feel your satire after this.’

But that was all the information that I vouchsafed to

any one of my mortifications of the evening before ; not even to Meg did I confess my imprudent speech ; but having, as I said, made up my mind to bury Cæsar, I tried to forget all about him. We had talked more of gentlemen and flirtation at breakfast, than we had ever talked before in all our lives. 'The natural result of going out,' mother said with a half sigh, as she listened to us. 'I don't like the idea of my children growing up and running away from me into the world.'

'But we are not going to run away,' said Nat. 'I, for one, am going to stay at home all the days of my life. Just this little glimpse of the outside world makes me want to cling to it all the closer. You can always count on me, mother.'

'And on me, and on me,' we cried all together ; and then father laughed and said,

'As long as you defy all rules of propriety, and talk at once, and keep up such a perpetual uproar, mother and I can count with perfect certainty upon you all.'

Up to this time we had really troubled ourselves very little about the future—that is, the future that young girls usually look forward to. Flirtation was a thing we had never talked about until this morning, and love and marriage never entered into our dreams. We lived our lives, enjoying and making the most of everything as we went along ; and the merest children yet, so far as the experiences of life went. Sometimes indeed Meg and I would lay out a wonderful future for Flo—Flo, our beautiful sister—for whom something great and wonderful was in reserve ; but as Meg said, that was our fairy tale—a tale that we wrought into something more beautiful and bewildering every time it was repeated. What trifles our lives were made up of ; little common-place nothings—

girls' dreams, fairy tales, a little thought, a little simple reasoning, which we mistook for wisdom—and so day by day our lives were shaped and rounded, and made ready for the future, and we scarcely knew or gave heed. It is true I used to wonder in a vague sort of way, if our family would ever break up like other families—scattered to the very ends of the earth, it might be. If Nat were to have a home and interests of his own, and Bob start off on a voyage around the world—it would be just like Bob to do the wildest sort of thing. I never thought of what Meg would do, she and I were always to stay together—that was one of the things that was foreordained; but Flo was to meet her Prince and go away into an enchanted land, where we were none of us good enough to follow. Would the old house be lonely without the young voices, and would we ever learn to be content one without the other, and speak and think, as many do, of far-away relatives? People do sometimes forget when they grow old.

I had other thoughts too. I wished that I could be really good. I had been good several times, in my own opinion, and then given it up as something too hard for such a nature as mine to understand. I had times of lofty aspiration, and times of great mental depression, but I could never feel for one moment anything like Meg's joyousness or Flo's serenity and peace. Flo had been just the same from early childhood, and it seemed only natural that the perfect bud should bloom into the beautiful rose, the fairest flower in our little home garden. It was more perfect than a fairy tale—it was so pure and holy, it helped all with whom it came in contact—just as if in the midst of one fairy tale we had turned over a leaf and come suddenly upon a bit of Bible

story or a quaint old hymn. But I, what would the page say of me? What were the swift rolling years making me? I intended all the time to be really good—it would come to me ‘one of these days,’ I said to myself, as all the blessings of my life had come, swiftly and suddenly, ‘as a dream when one awaketh.’ My heart was full of mute understandings and longings, but I was not able to reach the heights the others had gained, and I could not feel the infinite tenderness of the hands which were extended to draw me up.

Mother told me that I did not use the right means to make myself any better, for while both Meg and Flo went into the Church with a zest and interest that ought to have carried me along with it, I preferred to stay at home to paint my impossible pictures, or waste my time in nonsensical chat and pretended quarrels with Mr. Huntington, who came up to the house a good deal, and made himself anything but a stranger with us. He was such a merry light-hearted boy that one could not dislike him, though I tried very hard to make believe that I did, and always contrived to start some argument or quarrel so that I might oppose him. I had a feeling, too, that he was quizzing me ever since that eventful garden party at Mrs. Desmond’s. I don’t know why he treated me thus, unless he thought I was too young and silly to be sensible with, for he did not act so with Meg and Flo. To both of them he was dignity itself, and to Flo he gave the homage due a queen—or a saint, I had better say, for I heard him say one night that she seemed to him as holy as a nun, and I remember I retorted with some asperity that she was vastly more so than a nun—but I knew he admired her, though he almost always talked to me.

Mr. Aymer too fell into the pleasant little unconven-

tional ways of country life as easily as if he had been born and bred among us. He played croquet with the Desmonds and Homans, and sometimes in the pleasant Summer twilights, when there was no Church service or parish visit on-hand, he would come over for Meg and Flo to join them ; and then long walks on the beach would follow, or Bella Desmond and Flo would sing duetts in the pleasant moon-lit parlor, while the audience strayed about among the trees and roses outside. Mr. Aymar had certainly made himself a favorite with every one but me. Mrs. Desmond openly called him her young St. John, and our own family were almost as loud in their preference and praise. Meg and Flo joined hands with the Desmonds and Homans in all good works, and Flo had really settled down to one of the most engrossing duties of her life. She was down on the shore very much of the time helping the poor people there in a hundred different ways. I never heard her say much about Mr. Aymar, but I fancied that he liked Flo—indeed, it would have been strange had he not—but I was not at all inclined to make him the fairy prince, though until the prince came along I knew of no one that would suit Flo better.

Mr. Aymar had asked me several times to join the ladies in their round of visits, but I had never paid any attention to these demands upon my time. I detested the thought of work among the ragged children and dirty women, the smell of drying fish and the steaming of the washtubs,—somebody was always washing in such dismal places ; and yet one was forced to wonder sometimes what was done with the clean clothes—the children and women were never in anything but soiled frocks. But Mr. Aymar did not seem to mind it. He knew all the fishermen along the shore, had a pleasant word for

the wives, and a toss in the air for the babies, and often would go out for a row with the fathers, was a good hand at hauling in the nets, and brought more children in the Sunday-school than old Mr. Leighton, with all his goodness, dreamed that the parish contained. I often laughed and told Meg that I had named him rightly, for he was jesuitical and politic in the highest degree, but in my heart of hearts I admired and liked him. It was only wounded pride that tempered my admiration and made me perhaps more distant than I would have been otherwise, for I honestly thought that he disliked me ; and that certainly was anything but a pleasant reflection for a girl of my age, who, without having any particular love for the ministry, would still have been thankful to number among her adherents a man of Mr. Aymar's stamp. No, he clearly disliked me, and I tried not to care. He had not hesitated to express himself gravely and disapprovingly as to my lack of interest in Church matters, and on one or two occasions had absolutely lectured me ; but I always gave him some flippant reply, that seemed afterward, when I thought it over coolly, to only widen the gulf between us. After a time it seemed that he rather avoided me than otherwise, and I could scarcely blame him. I had certainly taken no pains to make myself agreeable or interesting to him. When the other young ladies bowed down and worshipped, I insisted upon walking coldly by ; but, with a strange persistency, I found my thoughts dwelling much upon the young clergyman, with his grave, disapproving eyes, and boyish face. It might have been a keen sense of mortification, but whatever the cause, I certainly suffered my mind to dwell upon the new rector very much more than I had any business to do.

Meantime the parish was waking up into new life, and I apparently the only idler in it. It was not enough to have two services on Sunday, and Sunday-school between, but there was an afternoon service on the shore for the fishermen, their wives and children; Mr. Aymar being content to establish himself in the little brown school-house, and walk two miles every Sunday to get there. In rain or sunshine he was there all the same, and the people soon began to regard him from Mrs. Desmond's standpoint. The old schoolhouse bloomed with flowers every Sunday, since adornments of other kinds could not be afforded, and did not know itself it was so decked out on every festival and Saint's day; and our own church was decorated in a manner that would have terrified a Low Churchman into fears for the souls of the whole parish. Mr. Leighton indulgently smiled approval at the unusual goings on, shaking his head a little over his young assistant's advanced ideas, but quite content to stand aside and entrust the reins of management to younger and abler hands. But it was not merely in petty adornments that Mr. Aymar brought about a new state of things: a Mission school was established, a Dorcas society organized, and district visiting among the poor regularly gone on with. Saturday was Meg and Flo's day. They would start out after breakfast with little baskets on their arms, going from house to house along the shore, dropping in only for a talk with some, persuading them into liking the Church, and interesting the children with pretty books and stories, or giving an unexpected and trifling present occasionally to the very poor. Every one knew and liked my two sisters, and as for Flo, many an old woman would sit in her easy chair by the door and watch for her coming. Indeed it was a

signal of great rejoicing among both old and young when Flo came, for she was not only ready to give sympathy and kind words, but she would read to them out of the Bible or some good book, for she never spared trouble, and was always ready to help those who helped themselves. The children learned to run after her and give her pretty shells and mosses that they had picked up along the beach—we laughed a good deal sometimes to see how carefully these relics were carried home, and treasured up as if they really were treasures.

All these things I was thoroughly convinced only made Mr. Aymar dislike me more than ever, for it was only at brief intervals that I woke up to a sense of my duty, and when I did do a charitable act or a kind deed, I did it so secretly that he never could find it out. No; it was quite impossible that we could be friends.

Sometimes I almost regretted that I hadn't joined the parish, and tried to follow in Flo's footsteps, though I am positively certain I should have done something to shock Mr. Aymar before I could have accomplished any good.

Perhaps it was just as well to be myself under all circumstances.



CHAPTER X.

FLO'S FAIRY TALE.

I am sure I thought I should never have anything to tell when I began my Chronicle—but, dear me, there's no end to the tellings now, as I think them over. I shall have to give up my picture and begin the book, just as Meg said I would, only I wish I could put the book and the picture both together and make it one. Some people could—those to whom life is all a poem ; but it seems to me that I am living out plain prose, straight on and on, and I couldn't write a story or a novel if I tried. It must be just a simple chronicle of home, that I scribble down on these pages, and the pictures and the poems I shall leave to my dreams.

And yet that first Summer at Cloverly was bright enough for any dream. If I had ever indulged in any flights of fancy about being out of the world, or in the wilderness, this first Summer dissipated it. To begin with the Desmonds ; they were certainly the leading spirits of the place ; the two daughters had friends from the city staying with them most of the time, and there were endless little gaieties going on, croquet, rides, walks, or boating in the still water, and sometimes the excitement of a sail in Mr. Huntington's yacht. The Homans were very intimate with the Desmonds, and were in and out at all times of the day, as near neighbors are apt to be with plenty of time at their own disposal, and every accessory of wealth to add to their enjoyment. It was maddening to meet them sometimes as we jogged along the road in our rattle-trap phaeton, with Dolly's head

down and her tongue out—if only she wouldn't have her tongue hanging out of her mouth, like an over-worked farm horse; but Meg would nod and smile as good humoredly from her low seat to the young ladies who dashed by in the high, open carriage, as if our horse were a full-blooded animal and we had a liveried servant in a rumble at our back. I always flushed up and bowed stiffly, ending with a snappish 'I'd like to cut that wretched old Dolly's tongue out. Don't you suppose the Desmonds and Homans are laughing themselves to death over the figure we cut?'

'No, I don't suppose anything of the kind,' Meg would say stoutly; 'and I, for one, am grateful to Uncle Janeway for lending us the good, steady, old creature. We'd stay at home, or trudge through the sand, but for her.' And then I would cool down and accept the situation—until next time.

'Dear me, how many worries there are in life,' I sighed to Meg. 'The love of money is the root of all evil, but it seems to me the lack of it caps the climax to every woe.'

'If you would only take things as they come, Barbara,' she would say, shaking her head, 'or as Flo would more properly express it, as they are sent.'

But it wasn't in my nature to be submissive, in those days. Sometimes I wonder if I even understand the meaning of the word now.

We saw a good deal of Mr. Aymar, too, and I had quite made up my mind that he, like all the rest of our little world, was interested in Flo. I was continually watching for our fairy tale to begin, only I was but half satisfied to have Mr. Aymar the prince. Sometimes, after one of these drives of ours, we would meet them strolling

along through the lane, the arms of both filled with ferns and wild flowers, chatting together as easily as if they had known each other all their lives. And perhaps Mr. Huntington would be lounging on the piazza with mother and Bess, tying up wreaths for some church decoration, and apparently caring more for a chat with mother than with her daughters. In that he showed good taste, we all acknowledged. I did not look with any complacency upon Mr. Aymar's visits, although to Meg I called him the Prince as well as a Jesuit. And Meg laughed merrily at my advancing such an idea. 'But,' I would ask, 'if he were not in love, why did he go mooning about with such a preoccupied air, strolling off in the woods or along the beach, and generally managing to walk home with Flo, no matter what direction she took?' And that was a question Miss Meg did not pretend to answer. It was all as clear as daylight to me. Unless he were very much in love, it was surely no way for a minister to conduct—a man who had souls to save, to waste so much time in walking about and gathering flowers; and yet all the time that I was persuading myself into this way of thinking, some little glimmer of light seemed to come in and show me other contingencies that I had never thought of before. I could not tell what it was, or scarcely what I meant, but a feeling of pain surged up into my heart, and tears which did not fall, moistened my eyes with a painful dew. I was never satisfied with Mr. Aymar, but now I began, for the first time in my life, to be vaguely dissatisfied with Flo.

Sometimes Mr. Aymar condescended to unbend a little in his coolness to me; he would lend me a book, or take the trouble to drop a few words of grave advice, and once in a way, just to see how it would seem to be good friends,

I would lay aside my frivolity and pettishness, and act as if I were willing to be taught. It was pleasant to receive his instruction as well as his attention, and there was nothing for me to do but listen with an air of gravity, as if I were at last entertaining sensible ideas of life. Sometimes a sudden feeling of compunction would come over me, and I would try being good for long, long days together, playing at it, as it were, as children do when they make believe 'keep house' and put on grown people's airs and cares. I had to make believe harder than they did, sometimes; though under it all would come a bright vision of living such a life as my young teacher would lay out for me. I was not without self-upbraidings, I was not without glimpses of better things, but I was not good enough to visit among the poor, and take an interest in all the pains and aches that are attendant upon old age, and so I would grow perverse and go back to my old wilful self, and drive Mr. Aymar farther away than ever. Nothing however would keep Flo from her duties, and she always managed to have as much time as I had for pleasure, too. She would go around among the fishermen and their wives, shaking hands with her tender little air of equality, that always seemed to me anything but that, her grace and tenderness putting even a wider gulf than ever between her and her pensioners. She was already quite clear on the subject of diseases, and her opinion was sought eagerly by the poor of the parish, although she was sometimes sorely puzzled, I knew, by their questions. But mother proved an able coadjutor in such matters. It was clearly never my forte—the work that old women, red flannel, and dirty babies brought; but there was plenty of it here; indeed, I fancy there is plenty of it anywhere, if one is only inclined to find it out.

Mr. Huntington came to the house a great deal about this time, and caused me sometimes almost as much uneasiness of mind as Mr. Aymer. Meg certainly did not care for him, and as for Flo, as long as she had Mr. Aymer I thought she should be content; and me, he evidently regarded as a forward child, on whom he bestowed a vast amount of chaff and snubbing, to pay for my waste of dignity. But it really seemed a thing that we were quite helpless to control, this untrammelled footing into which he had glided among our family, for he was attentive to no one in particular, unless it was to mother, and mother made no secret of her affection for him. The only thing that Meg and I disliked was an unfortunate habit of saying right out the first thought that came into his head. Sometimes it was funny enough to make us all laugh; oftener it was a boyish brusquerie that it was hard to brook, though on the whole we liked him. But we often asked ourselves why he staid so long. He did not apparently have any business upon hand in our locality, and yet he seemed to have settled down as an inhabitant, as completely as we ourselves had. He had nothing to call him away either, and beyond the yachting and fishing, what attraction could there be? It was a great puzzle to us all, for he succeeded in leading the most indolent, useless life, that I had ever seen. Bess summoned up courage one day to ask him what his business was. 'A Müssigganger,' he said, with a short laugh, and the poor child was poring over the German Dictionary for weeks, hunting out the word, and then was sadly disappointed in finding that *Müssigganging* was a very unprofitable business taken from an American point of view.

As she was a persevering little type of Yankee, however, she would not give it up so, and continued her in-

vestigations by asking him why he staid so long. He looked confused, stammered 'Upon my word, lady bird, I don't know,' and then a great laugh followed it.

No one apparently had invited him to remain, and he was visiting no one in particular. He had a good room in one of the small hotels, his yacht lay out in the cove, his fishing tackle and gun decorated the walls of his apartment, and he had settled down for the remainder of his days, one might judge from his style of conversation, and the way in which he fraternized with the fishermen and farmers, to say nothing of St. Thomas' parish. Every one accepted him as a good companion and a fine fellow—a trifle indolent, which was after all not so deplorable a thing, since, as Mrs. Desmond assured her friends, he was possessed of ample means and alone in the world. His mother had been one of her dearest friends, and Neal, she declared with her usual effusion, was almost like a son to her; yet, after the first, he was really on a more intimate footing in our house than at the Desmonds, and at the rectory he was in and out at all times of the day with the assurance of a privileged character. He certainly was not staying for his friend Mr. Aymer's sake—that gentleman's tastes were not at all in his line; and the grave, studious Mr. Homans rarely if ever had a word to say to him. And old Mr. Leighton could not be the attraction, although there was scarcely a day that a fine fish was not taken up to the rectory, and Mr. Huntington was sure to drop in before the day was out for a little advice or a little discussion, for in his youthful days Mr. Leighton loved the sports of the angler, and took even now the greatest interest in any one who carried a rod and reel. Mr. Huntington too seemed to like the rectory people quite as much as they liked him, and was

never more happy apparently than when he was stretched on the grass puffing his cigar and recounting his last day's sport, while the old lady sat placidly under the vine-covered porch, nodding her lace capped head in smiling approval, though she didn't hear a word of the conversation.

But Mr. and Mrs. Leighton, though charming as two old people could possibly be, were not enough in themselves to detain a young man in the country weeks and weeks beyond the time which he had allotted to himself when he first came. I put the question to Meg one night when we were in bed, whispering under the clothes so that Flo might not hear, and when she professed utter ignorance, I said 'I've found it all out. I have just watched and seen for myself. Its Flo he is staying for, Meg. He adores the very ground under her feet,'—shooting out the words as if they were torpedoes, and expecting a proper amount of active surprise on her part.

'Bab, you are a perfect Munchausen,' she laughed. 'We couldn't exist without your fertile brain. It was only a week ago that Mr. Aymer was the Prince.'

'Well, Mr. Aymer likes her too. It's perfectly natural that everybody should like her. We must expect that, you know; and I've learned to enjoy looking for it. Mr. Aymer is very proper, and all that sort of thing, but you must acknowledge that Mr. Huntington makes it more like a fairy tale; beside, I, for one, could never be satisfied with Mr. Aymer.'

'And why not, pray?' asked Meg. 'Think how good he is, and how he works among the poor, and how they love him already. And beside the goodness, Mr. Leighton thinks him already a brilliant man in his profession. What possible objection can you have to Mr. Aymer?'

'He is too good, for one thing. He expects too much from ordinary mortals. I like every day people—people who don't set up impossible things to do. I never had a fancy for reformers. It's all very nice to hear about, after the things are done,—work and duty and self-sacrifice are such beautiful words to put in a sermon or in a book, but it is awful to live in an age when it is required of one.'

'I don't see that it makes any difference what age we live in,' said Meg oracularly, from under her side of the bed-clothes; 'we can find our duties just the same if we have a mind to see them. Those who wilfully shut their eyes and then blindfold themselves, cannot expect to see.'

'Don't go off into metaphors,' I said. 'Say you mean me, and have done with it. I don't mind your little lectures, but I do detest Mr. Aymar's. Let us go back to the old subject. What do you think of Mr. Huntington's lingering here so long?'

'He is staying for the fishing.'

'That's just what I've been telling you all along.'

'Nonsense! A pretty romance you are making!' and Meg laughed so loudly and so long that Flo, who was nearly lost in quiet dreams, called out from the adjoining room to know if anything remarkable had happened.

And Meg laughed again as she answered back 'O only one of Bab's inspirations; but it will keep until to-morrow, I rather think, and you shall hear all about it then.'

'You must never tell her,—you must never tell her, Meg,' I whispered, as I held her close in my arms. 'I'll never forgive you if you do, for I've found out something else, something that I wouldn't tell for the world—you never could keep a secret, you know.'

Meg was at once interested. 'Tell me, Bab, and I won't lisp a word to Flo, or to any one.'

'Won't you really?'

'No, I will not; and you know when I make a promise I generally keep it.'

'Very well then. Flo loves him as much as he loves her.'

'Why, Barbara Fox! It was only the other day that we were all in pinafores, playing "Puss in the corner," and now your head is full of falling in love,—and you, the youngest of the three. You are crazy, Bab!'

And Meg, greatly scandalized, sat up in bed, ran her fingers through her hair, and surveyed me with mild incredulity. 'It's all nonsense! It's no such thing!' she said when she lay down again.

'Very well; you'll see you are mistaken one of these days,' I uttered sagely. 'Flo isn't herself at all. You see for yourself how much she wanders off alone, and how quiet and dreamy she is. Sometimes when we are talking she wakes up long enough to answer a question, but you know she is not herself.'

'Bab,' said Meg softly, 'I'm afraid she isn't well. How pale and thin she grows. She looks like a spirit to me sometimes. It worries me, and I see mother looking anxious,—she watches her, although she says nothing. I think the poor child is not well.'

'And I think she's in love,' said I; 'that is the way they always act.'

'Yes, in the paper covered novels that you read,' laughed Meg; 'now-a-days people don't conduct themselves as if they were acting in a second rate tragedy. Do get off your stilts, Bab, and go to sleep like a sensible girl.'

Mother would think her children were crazy if she heard half of their silly talk.'

'Mother has probably said the very same things that we are saying when she was our age,' I commented rather tartly, and turning my face to the wall I pretended to go to sleep.

I was vexed with Meg, and annoyed that she did not fall into my way of thinking at once. I always felt that I had her sympathy and support in all my hallucinations, —yes, it was very strange that for once in her life Meg was obtuse.

I lay awake some time, turning the thought over and over in my mind, and the more I dwelt upon it the more fixed the idea became. I wondered what we had all been dreaming over that we could not have seen for ourselves long ago. Now I woke up and understood it all, little acts and words unnoticed at the time crowding into my mind, and proving my conclusions true. Yes, Neal Huntington loved Flo, and all along I had stupidly thought it was Mr. Aymar.

Now our fairy tale had begun! Now indeed the Prince, for whom we had waited all our lives, had come!



CHAPTER XI.

THE LEGEND OF ST. CHRISTOPHER.

We spent a great deal of time upon the cliffs that Summer. We went in parties, and we went by ourselves ; we took our work and our books and passed whole long mornings there ; we sat on the gray rocks and looked out over those wonderful spaces of sea and air, and dreamed our own dreams. There seemed no better place to lose one's self, and we were never weary of trying the experiment. Sometimes in the clear and sunny early morning we saw the gray fishing boats go out, riding the long swell of the breakers as carelessly and gracefully as swallows on the wing, or in the distance the white sail of a yacht would skim lightly across our view, and we would watch until, like a phantom, it had disappeared. And all the time the soft long ripple of the waves, lapping upon the sands below, stole up to us with a ceaseless murmur, that was almost like a moan, it was so weary. Soft sounds, slow gliding motions, and drowsy whisperings, filled the whole vast boundlessness of space. And we were content to go on with our dreams as we listened.

One day we had an addition to our party—a young lady that was staying with the Desmonds came over with Bella, Mr. and Mrs. Homans, and Mr. Winnie, to play croquet with us under the pleasant shade of our old trees. They found Mr. Aymar and Mr. Huntington on the ground before them, and much of the afternoon was consumed in croquet, when some one proposed an excursion to the cliffs and a picnicing tea after we got there. Mr. Aymar at once declined, pleading engagements along

the shore, but Mr. Huntington insisted upon his giving up for once and going.

'You have never seen our grand Cathedral walk, and you have never joined one of our excursions, yet. I'm determined you shall go, so submit with as good grace as possible,' he said, linking his arm within that of the young clergyman.

'But Mrs. Ross will expect me,' he urged.

'A little waiting will do her good, then. Anybody that has paralysis needs stirring up occasionally. It will be like an electric shock to find that you cannot keep an engagement.'

Still Mr. Aymar hesitated, but Flo settled it all with a few quiet words.

'I was there to-day, and she seemed more comfortable—beside, you will have time to visit her after our little picnic is over.'

He bowed his thanks, said something that I could not hear, and professed his willingness to join us. Meg flew into the house and gathered some cake and fruit in baskets, and we all sallied forth, Mr. Huntington running back to slip a volume of Tennyson in his pocket.

'We'll make Homans read,' he said, 'when we get up there. His voice is just full and sonorous enough for Tennyson.'

I had only exchanged three words with Mr. Aymar that whole afternoon, and those three words were 'Very well, thanks,' to his formal bow and 'How do you do.' I should as soon have thought of the sun obligingly stepping down out of heaven to make obeisance before me, as for Mr. Aymar, entrenched in his priestly dignity, to notice me by a word or a look. I cared very little about the sun, I said to myself—he might beam on me or not,

just as he pleased. And then I smiled at my far-fetched comparison, for no iceberg could be colder than he, when he chose. He was not cold naturally, that I knew. He had warmth of feeling enough when he was speaking to his congregation from the pulpit or reading desk, and I had seen his face light up with the most tender and kindly sympathy when he stopped to shake hands with the poor and aged of the parish. But at such times he was practising the requirements of his profession—acting out the word duty in its loftiest sense—though I could not deny that I had seen something of the same expression, this very afternoon of which I write, when he was talking to Flo under the trees. But then we know that even Iceland has its Hecla

As for me, I was content to chat with my new acquaintance as we walked behind the others, listening and sometimes commenting upon their conversation. It was a glorious day, full of sunshine and singing of birds, with a soft haze resting over the water, and scarcely a cloud anywhere to be seen. We were all in high spirits, and Mr. Aymar seemed to have entirely forgotten that he had tried to get away from us. Nat and Miss Homans led the way over the meadows, where they branched off across the hot beach sand, our usual path, but then very warm with the sun shining full upon it.

‘We are good Romanists,’ said Mr. Huntington, looking back and laughing. ‘We won’t take our Paradise without the Purgatory beforehand.’

‘The heat is intolerable,’ I said, making a halt while Mr. Winnie fanned me with my broad hat.

‘We are going this way to the Cathedral walk,’ Nat called out. ‘It will be cool and delightful after we reach it, and we can sit there and read until the sun is low.’

‘Delightful!’ said Mr. Aymar on behalf of the whole, looking around as if it were everybody’s duty and pleasure to please him.

I like to snub such people. It takes them by surprise of course, but then surprises are good for us—sometimes. If you want to spoil a child, give it its own way, and the same rule holds good with men and women. I like to have my own way, but then, as Meg says, *that* has nothing to do with the rule; under all circumstances that remains the same.

‘I think it is anything but delightful,’ I said, ‘crawling through the hot sand. It is all very well for gentlemen who wear heavy English shoes, to talk of skipping through it, but it is very uncomfortable for us. Let us climb up the rocks now and walk on the top of the cliff; there is grass short and velvety enough to make a carpet for a queen.’

Everybody obligingly turned around at once, and in a few minutes we were all scrambling among the slippery rocks, the gentlemen being in constant requisition to aid our unwary steps. In going up, we were grouped differently. Mr. Aymar had come around to Flo’s side, and Mr. Huntington, after his momentary tribute of admiration, flitted back to us, and was agreeable and amusing as one could well be. Nat and Miss Homans still led the way, and we followed along the rocky path, the trees meeting overhead in gothic vistas of cool green shade. We scrambled through brakes and patches of stunted grass, over loose stones and heavy boulders, arriving at last at the top of the rough gray rock that thrust its front abruptly up from the sands below. How beautiful it was, with its groinings of laced boughs and frettings of dancing sunshine. We wandered under the leafy

arches, talking as we are apt to talk, in the quiet, subdued tones that seemingly befit such a place. And I noticed that Mr. Aymer had given his arm to Flo. I could not tell what they were talking about, for Mr. Winnie was telling us of the last regatta ; but I saw his head bent to meet hers, I saw the thoughtful expression of her face, and I knew that she was listening as she always listened when he talked—as if she had no thought for anything else in the world. I said to myself I was sorry Flo should flirt, and yet all the time I knew that it was not flirting. It was too earnest a friendship for that, and it was much too serious to be love. What was it, then ? And was she, after all, thinking or caring anything about the fairy tale we had planned for her ?

‘Mr. Aymer was led a willing victim in spite of his protestations,’ remarked Mr. Huntington significantly. ‘As soon as your sister made her appeal I noticed that he was ready to neglect his duties for once.’

‘Mr. Aymer never neglects a duty,’ I interposed haughtily.

‘I beg pardon,—postponed it, I will say. Is that any better ?’

‘Vastly better,’ I said, and then I felt the blood dyeing my face and neck in a painful flood—to think that I had been willing to take up arms for a man who had showed positive dislike to me ! I looked up and saw that my companion’s eyes were full of laughter.

‘I did not think I had said anything worthy of a laugh,’ I remarked wrathfully, ‘though it is very comforting to know I can amuse you in any way. Pray do not consider my feelings in the least,—only tell me that I may join you.’

‘I beg pardon again. Don’t you see how many times

you put me in the position of an abject suppliant?—that at least ought to satisfy you,—do let us be sensible for once. I suppose you do not care to wander off like the rest and explore. Miss Wagner, Mr. Aymer and Mr. Winnie have never seen all the beauties of this spot, but we know it so well.'

'Like our A B C,' I said. 'I had much rather sit down and wait.'

'Yes, and talk. I won't laugh at you again, and I promise you, you shall not laugh at me.' And then he spread my shawl upon a rock and we two sat down under the laurel trees together, while the others wandered away, their voices coming back to us now and again in confused murmurings mixed with laughter.

We two sat and talked, for once in our lives laying aside our weapons of warfare. I have every reason to believe that we were melancholy enough, under these extraordinary circumstances, to begin with the Pre-Adamite formations and go on to the true theory of growth and evolution of Mind and Matter. We were solemn and astute enough to satisfy the most critical, and then we suddenly wandered off like children, picking flowers and grasses, and coming back to our first resting place to weave wreaths for the whole party.

'This is where we always bring our work,' I said, taking Flo's favorite seat and sorting out my flowers as I spoke.

'Indeed! "How doth the little busy bee"—

'But the hours *are* shining,' I said.

'I have found them so,' he replied, 'but wouldn't you prefer hearing Mr. Homans read, now?' as the full, sonorous voice came floating up to us from the hollow a little below.

'That depends upon what he is reading. If it be Huxley on Protoplasm, or Darwin on the Origin of Species, I think I shall prefer staying here. We have had heavy talk enough to last for a season.'

'But it is Tennyson, you know. I really think we are missing something.'

'Go, then, if you like ; I prefer staying here.'

'What, alone ?'

'Yes, alone.'

'I can't allow it,' and he reseated himself.

'But what if I prefer it.'

'What ! You don't like my society any longer ? I cannot credit your poor taste.'

'I can only give you my word for it.'

'And what if I do not take it ?'

'I am not in the witness-box, and I shall do nothing further.'

He made me the most profound bow. 'I shall go and seek Miss Flo,' he said as he twirled his hat in his hand.

'Do you think I shall be made as welcome as you have made me here for the last hour or two ?'

'I cannot tell. I fancy Mr. Aymar is with her,' I said, bringing in his name at a venture.

He stooped to pick up some grasses, but his face was crimson for an instant. 'My spirit of good fellowship is always getting me in trouble,' he said. 'I wish the parson had staid at home.'

'Why ?' I asked, looking him full in the eyes.

'Because I would like, for once in my life, to have an opportunity of seeing Miss Flo alone,' he said with sudden effusion. 'Suppose I tell Aymar you want to consult him up here on important parish matters, or that you are puzzled in the Catechism that you have been

studying so diligently of late, or maybe overcome with remorse when you ponder on your neglect of old Mother Ross. By Jove ! I'll try it.'

'Do it if you dare,' I said. 'You know I don't want Mr. Aymar here.'

'I beg pardon, then—I will not intrude,' said that ubiquitous gentleman, and turning around, I discovered him, with a flush on his face, standing irresolutely in the path.

'You are my evil genius,' I cried with a frown as Mr. Huntington escaped and left me standing alone before Mr. Aymar ; and then, with a laugh I could not resist, I said 'I really beg your pardon. Of course I shouldn't have said such a thing if I had not been provoked beyond endurance by that mischievous boy. He has got me into trouble ever since he came. I will be glad enough when he goes away.'

Again Mr. Aymar bowed.

'Wont you sit down a minute, please ? I want to tell you why I spoke so.'

'Pray do not apologize.'

'But I want to. Can't I do as I please ?' I knew I spoke like a child. I wished so much that I could say and do things as they write them in books—graceful little subterfuges and complimentary speeches that are always ready in every young woman's mouth ; but when he had gravely seated himself and I tried to speak, it suddenly flashed across my mind what was there to say ! I surely could not tell him that Mr. Huntington wanted to speak to Flo alone, and that he was in the way ! 'I—I didn't mean that I didn't want to see you,' I said, stammering like a school-girl, and blushing painfully.

'Thank you. I am indebted to you for your unusual

courtesy. Pray what has occurred to make you change your mind so suddenly ?

‘I—I didn’t want to see you at all,’ I retorted quickly.

‘Now I go back to my first supposition—I clearly am not wanted.’

How much cooler he was than I. ‘Mr. Huntington was saying very silly things,’ I said bluntly. ‘I cannot explain—and I spoke hastily and foolishly. I beg you will think nothing of it.’

‘Then let it drop, pray,’ he said, really pitying my embarrassment and silliness. ‘We will talk of something else, and I shall consider all your unfavorable opinions of me as put away and ended.’

‘But I haven’t any unfavorable opinion of you.’

‘Have you not? I am glad to hear it. I would like every member of my congregation to, at the least, give me a cordial greeting when I meet them.’

‘And should you like me to do so?’

‘I really should.’

‘Agreed,’ I said. ‘I supposed you did not care.’

‘Miss Barbara, I do care very much,’ and his voice was slightly tremulous. ‘I never cared more for anything in my life. It has always seemed to me that you purposely avoided or deliberately cut me. This is my first parish, you know, and I cannot express how deeply I feel every little act of kindness’—he hesitated a moment and then added ‘or unkindness.’

A little thrill of pleasure fluttered in my heart at this observation. It was not that I liked Mr. Aymar, I thought, but I was pleased to discover that I was no longer a nonentity, or a being in whom he had not the slightest interest,—it was a kind of acknowledgment that I

was one of his flock, in spite of any effort that I had heretofore made to throw off the yoke.

'I have always had an unfortunate proclivity for saying and doing the things I ought not to do,' I acknowledged with a little more color than usual. 'I can't unmake myself, or seem to be what I am not. I suppose I have shocked you with my brusquerie many times.'

'Not with that,' he interrupted.

'With what, then?' I asked.

'With your carelessness—your lightness—your disregard of serious things.'

'I suppose so. It was always my melancholy privilege. However I believe it is well that one has the merit of remaining true to one's self.'

'Excuse me,' he said gravely, 'I don't think you are true to yourself. I should like to see you giving full scope to all the faculties which have been bestowed upon you. Yours is a candid and generous nature, Miss Barbara, if you don't cramp yourself and try too narrow a groove of action.'

'Action!' I said listlessly, 'you have no idea how I dislike the word. I love ease. I would like to explore for myself and find "the land where it is always afternoon—a land where all things always seem the same."'

He shook his head. 'I do not believe in your dreamful ease. Lotus Eating is only a very pretty name now-a-days for moral lethargy. I believe we were put into the world to wage a warfare and to conquer in the fight.'

I looked up at him from under my broad brimmed hat and quoted—

"Time driveth onward fast,
And in a little while our lips are dumb;
Let us alone. What is it that will last?"

'Eternity,' he said softly and gravely.

It was an old, old word, that I sometimes said over to myself wonderingly and dreamily, and sometimes shudderingly—now it came before me with a fresh, live meaning in it, as he spoke it out there in the still woods, the dusky, interlaced boughs above, the whole wide arc of blue, like eternity itself, spread before us, still and unruffled as that sea of glass that sweeps before the great white throne. Straightway into my heart leaped the one unutterable longing of my life—rarely felt and lightly fostered, yet coming back to me again like a ray of light in a stormy sky—the desire to be good and pure, and true of heart, the words coming into my mind almost as he spoke, ‘they shall walk in white for they are worthy.’

I turned away my eyes with a choking sensation in my throat. ‘I do wish I could take hold of some certainty of faith. It seems so easy for some people to live. They take this life as a mere preparation for something higher,—to one, eternity is an abyss; to another, it means heaven and home; but for me the pilgrimage and the outlook is more uncertain,—it is a problem, not of mine alone, but of the whole world.’

‘We make it a problem,’ he said, ‘when the figure is clear; but we must begin at the beginning, and read the promise plain. We must not fold our hands in dreamful ease, or try to climb up some other way. We are apt to think that religion is an article that we can lay hold of abstractly; we forget that it is a thing of growth, not of instant bestowal.’

‘But when I try I feel like a child fretting over a tangled skein—the more I puzzle over it the harder the knots become.’

‘Not if you begin the work patiently and slowly, in

the right way. I have always found a loose end somewhere to lay hold of, and once you have that in your hand, you can work out the whole thing clearly. It does not do to trifle with one's immortal soul as one would dally over a tangled skein—if you like the metaphor, Miss Barbara.'

'Mine are all loose ends, I believe, beside being hopelessly tangled. If I ever think I have a clue, I find it is only one of the short ends. Ah! here comes my *bete noir* again,' as Mr. Huntington appeared with Miss Wagner upon his arm instead of Flo, while the rest of the party followed slowly. He made me a smiling grimace, expressive of the most heart-rending disappointment as he led the young lady to a seat by my side. Our sober talk was ended—so suddenly it seemed—just like one of my tangled threads—broken almost before I had begun to unravel it. That is the way things are mixed in this life—picnics and sermons, poetry and prose, Mr. Aymars and Mr. Huntingtons, a world made up of antagonisms.

'Why did you not bring Miss Barbara down to hear Mr. Homans read?' said Mr. Winnie. 'You said you were going to fetch her.'

'I have been preaching a very dull sermon to Miss Barbara, instead,' he replied, 'and I believe I became so interested in it that I forgot my errand.'

'You should have called us up to hear,' said Netta Homans, who always made it a point to listen to every word that dropped from the young clergyman's lips, as if it were altogether too precious to be lost.

'I fear it was not worth the hearing, or remembering,' he hesitated with a momentary shyness that was habitual to him.

'We have come up for our tea,' said practical Meg;

'after that we will hear sermon or poetry, just as you choose.'

She bustled away with housewifely zeal to open her basket, while Nat distributed little plates of bark that he and Mr. Winnie had been industriously collecting. By and by, when our interest in the light cakes and dainty fruit had somewhat abated, Mr. Aymar was called upon for his sermon, if he would give it.

The beautiful Summer afternoon was nearly gone. While we had lingered the woods around us had grown black with cool shadows, and the hush of the nearing twilight was upon us.

'We are tired of picnicing,' said Miss Homans, 'let us sit here and tell stories, just as we used when we were children, Ned, to pass the time away before going home.'

'Aye,' said her brother, 'but who will be our Schezerade?'

'Mr. Aymar,' said I. 'He can go on with the sermon that our summons to tea, interrupted.'

Mr. Aymar stood leaning against a pine tree, his slight figure clearly defined against the sky, his arms folded, the sunset shining on his face—an earnest and rather absorbed face it was, as if he were lost in some serious thought. He started slightly as I spoke—bowed and said 'The thread was broken and the clue gone.'

'But you can tell us a story,' I said; 'you ought to tell one well. Bess says that you do.'

'I take off my hat to Bess. Pray where has she ever had an opportunity of judging?'

'In Sunday-school, of course.'

'Those were Bible stories.'

'Then tell us one.'

'No,' said Miss Desmond, 'let him tell us a legend.'

You know, Mr. Aymar, you promised to tell me the story of St. Christopher.'

'But every one knows it by heart, and there are so many versions of it.'

'Give us yours,' still persisted Miss Desmond.

'I am afraid it will be a clear case of plagiarism.'

'We are all plagiarists,' said Mr. Homans. 'Don't you remember that Cromwell's celebrated saying, "Trust Providence, but keep your powder dry," appears in *Æschylus* in another form when Thebes is defended, "The people must pray indeed, but look well to the fortifications" The Scripture injunction has always been "Watch and pray." This reproduction of old ideas once caused a French wit to exclaim against the ancients, "Confound the fellows,—they stole all our thoughts before we were born!"'

'Very true,' said Mr. Aymer. 'Almost everything seems to have been said once; we only elaborate the old ideas, after all. I wonder sometimes that anybody can think for a moment he is telling anything new.'

'But we have none of us heard St. Christopher's story,' said Netta Homans. 'We shall not know if you are telling it in the old style or the new.'

'O no, indeed,' we all said in chorus; so Mr. Aymar sat down at the foot of the pine tree, took off his hat, and smiled as he asked 'Shall I tell it after the proscribed fashion of legends, "once upon a time?"—or no—I will try something a little newer,' and then began.

In the pleasant land of Canaan dwelt the giant Offero; full of prowess was this warrior, mighty with the sword and bow; all his life had he been seeking service with a mighty King—to the greatest earthly monarch, he would

ready service bring. Now he knew not Christ or Satan, for a heathen man was he ; but he saw the King, his master, sometimes pause and bend his knee ; and at the name of Satan he would cross himself in fear, and he told the giant bearer that he felt him very near.

‘Mr. Aymar,’ exclaimed Miss Desmond, ‘you are telling it in rhyme !’

‘I beg your pardon,’ he replied, ‘I thought it was the dullest, coldest prose. Shall I stop ?’

‘By no means. I should beg your pardon for interrupting you.’

He bowed and went on.

Then up spoke the stalwart giant, ‘He, my master, must not know what it is to fear and tremble at the name of any foe. So I leave your service straightway, and journey till I find if this stronger King, and wiser, shall be more unto my mind.’ So he wandered, seeking Satan, up and down the mountain steep, far across the trackless desert, through lone forests wild and deep ; and he rested not, or faltered, till the Arch Fiend he had found ; and he bowed himself before him, with his face upon the ground, crying out ‘I lie before thee, prostrate in the very dust ; may my right hand fail, if ever it prove recreant to its trust.’ Then the subtle, wily tempter, answered ‘Join my ranks, I pray ; I have need of loyal servants, so I welcome you to-day.’ And they journeyed on together, striding o’er the sunny land, past the shining wastes of desert with its heaps of golden sand ; till, anear an ancient city, they paused to rest and drink from a little wayside fountain with a cross above its brink,—just a little cross of carv-

ing with a figure graven there ; yet to drink from that pure fountain, even Satan did not dare.

‘Ah, my master,’ quoth the giant, ‘I have loved thy service well ; but before this cross thou tremblest, and thou must the reason tell.’

‘Aye, I tremble,’ answered Satan ; ‘on this cross the Saviour died. He, the LORD of earth and heaven, greater than all kings beside, now is crowned with might and glory, seated on His Father’s throne, with both earth and hell beneath him,—this is Christ whose power I own.’

‘Then I leave thee,’ quoth the giant, ‘and I seek the Holy One. He shall be the King, my Father, and I will be his son.’

So he left the arch deceiver, and he wandered far and wide, asking where to find this Saviour, Who for love of sinners died. Then an ancient hermit met him journeying on his weary way, and he taught the giant bearer how to Jesus he should pray—taught him of the great All Father, Who was pitiful and kind, till the scales fell from his vision, and he saw, who once was blind. Longed he then with deeds of daring, love and fealty, then to bring to the feet of his new Master, Christ the Lord, Who was his King.

‘Knowest thou a deep, wide river,’ asked the hermit old and gray, ‘rushing down between dark chasms, cleaving through the rocks its way ? strong and rapid is the current, and upon its dreary shore many pause and shrink affrighted, daring not to venture o’er. Thou canst aid them, mighty giant, thou canst lend a helping hand, and if Christ the Master will it, thou canst bring them safe to land.’

So went Offero rejoicing, crossed the foaming, swollen

tide, built a simple hut of branches, and became the pilgrim's guide. Many fainting souls he strengthened, many saved from death and loss, while all the time before him rose that figure on the Cross—rose the figure, fair and saintly; deep the wounds on hands and feet, with a face of wondrous beauty, and a smile both pure and sweet. 'Thou art doing well, brave giant; keep thy Faith in Him Who died,' these the words that ever sounded clear above the roaring tide; and his soul was greatly strengthened by these words of holy cheer, and he labored on untiring, feeling neither pain nor fear. Now one night when he was sleeping in his hut beside the stream, faintly calling, calling, calling, broke a voice upon his dream. 'Offero,' it still kept calling, 'wake at once, good Offero; carry me across the river; thou wilt bear me safe, I know.' Now the waves were tossing wildly, and the winds rose fierce and high, yet above the roar of tempest floated down that childish cry: 'I am weary,' it kept calling, 'I am weary with the fight; come and bear me safely over in your giant arms to-night.' 'I am coming,' called the bearer, 'I am coming to your aid, with my good and trusty palm staff; little one, be not afraid.' Then the angry clouds just parted, and a trembling moonbeam shone down upon the foamy waters—struggling there a child alone. Then he caught the little stranger, laid the golden head to rest, wound his giant arms about him, folded him upon his breast. 'Courage!' cried the stalwart giant, 'I will bring you safe to shore,' but the child made never answer, only clinging as before. And the waves rolled high and higher, and the burden heavier grew—scarcely 'gainst the angry current could the giant struggle through; yet he toiled on, breasting bravely raging wind and stormy

tide—with the aid of his good palm tree, safely reached the other side. 'Ah! whom have I borne,' he murmured, 'who is it my strength has tried?' Then the child looked up and answered "'Tis the Lord Who for thee died. Long hast thou desired to see me, long desired thy love to prove, know to-night that thou hast borne Me, and I bless thee with my love. Plant thy palm tree now, good bearer, here upon the solid earth, and the tender shoots uprising shall be type of thy new birth.' And, at the instant bidding, budded forth the tender green; clustering dates hung from its branches—stranger sight were never seen. Then the raging wind was silenced, and a voice both sweet and low whispered 'He who bore the Saviour, must be called Christ Offero'; but the little child had vanished; and alone, as heretofore, stood the giant by the river gazing on the opposite shore.

Still in quaint, old German cities, on the hillsides clad with vine, in the castle, in the hamlet, and along the flowing Rhine—when the quiet Summer sunsets die along the glowing west, and the wee ones, tired of playing, lean upon the mothers' breasts—is the legend oft repeated; rich and poor, and high and low, tell the children how the giant's name became Christoffero.

The legend was ended. I had watched him while he was speaking, and saw his face brightening, his eyes kindling with earnest light and thought—but when he ceased I started as if from a reverie.

'We shall make you tell us legends whenever we come to the woods,' said Miss Homans graciously, 'only I want to know why you told us this. Is there a meaning under it all that we are to take individually to ourselves?'

'That I leave to your own judgment,' said Mr. Aymar.

‘I have simply told the old story,—you must draw your own inferences.’

Flo was looking up at him with a rare expression that lit her eyes at times and made their crystal depths liquid and dark with intense inward feeling, but she dropped them again when Miss Homans said, turning to look at her, ‘What were you going to say—or, what were you thinking of, my dear?’

‘I thought—perhaps,’ hesitated Flo, ‘we might all be Christofferos if we tried; sometimes—sometimes the burden might be so light and small we would not know.’

‘Not until we had crossed the river,’ said Mr. Aymar softly; and then he rose and gave his arm to Flo, and her face, uplifted to his, seemed almost spiritual in its beauty to me, with the soft glow of the sunset resting upon it.

‘Yes, we must go home,’ said Meg, rousing herself; but our walk home was quiet and grave, and when we did talk, it was of more solemn and earnest things than had occupied our minds in coming.

After all there was some magnetism about Mr. Aymar. Even I could not help thinking how sweet it would be, after the river was crossed, to find that one, unconsciously, had borne some little burden for the love of Christ.



CHAPTER XII.

TANGLED THREADS.

There was a little change in my life after that day on the cliffs with Mr. Aymer. Sometimes I hoped that it might be a change for the better, although I could scarcely have defined even to myself of what it consisted, it was all so made up of longings and failures. I seemed to be leading a sort of dual existence—a pleasant, quiet, truthful sort of life with my mother and sisters; a gay, careless, contradictory one, among the new friends who had gathered about us. There were limitless outlooks from this latter state, while the other was simple and settled as it were for all time. Once in awhile that undefined something would flash across my mind, comparable only to the stray gleams of goodness I had when I was a child, and pretended 'very hard' to make it last; but I always repressed such indications of feeling before Mr. Aymer, and he, I fear, imagined that I never had any longings at all, or even in a furtive way tried to do my duty.

Full of contradictions as I was about this time, of course I rarely trusted myself to be myself before Mr. Aymer. He kept on coming to the house very quietly, contenting himself with a chat with mother, if we were away. Bess said he came to see the house, for he never asked for any one in particular. It was certainly pleasant to have him come; yes—I may surely write that down here, it is such a comfort to be one's self sometimes, to set down unreservedly just one's thoughts and emotions—yes, I was glad of these diffusive little visits of Mr.

Aymar's, and yet when he came, I acted as if it were a matter of no consequence at all. I was proud of his friendship, I even liked his tendency to sermonizing with me, and his invariable habit of taking up my lightest word and reproving my levity and thoughtlessness. If he happened not to come when I expected him, I felt a vague sense of uneasiness that I did not stop to analyze. And yet I would say to Meg, 'A very presuming young man, he needs snubbing every day of his life.'

'What! Mr. Aymar? your clergyman?' Meg would reply, lifting her brows in astonishment. 'What do you find about him to warrant such audacity?'

'His black waistcoat, for one thing. I am too secular in my tastes to like that or his broad brimmed hat.'

'As if a matter of dress were like opinions! Barbara Fox, you are demented!' and Meg would shrug her shoulders, while I would mutter something about lunacy being my normal condition.

Clearly Meg and I would never agree about Mr. Aymar.

Neal Huntington, too, still lingered among us, though even he, I suspected, could scarcely have told why. It gave a little excitement and interest to our quiet life to speculate upon the causes of his stay, as well as to watch Flo, who had grown pale and listless, for some reason or other, and was not herself at all, though she was neither selfishly absorbed nor dead to her own duties. Father said the heat of the Summer had prostrated her, and mother sometimes remonstrated with her because of her long walks and strict attention to the daily services, while even Meg and I would use our influence to keep her at home, but she usually smiled away our fears, and went on with her little charities just the same. In spite of the

vague anxiety she caused us, Mr. Huntington and Flo were still the hero and heroine of our fairy tale, which had all the excitement and newness of such a story, as their interest in each other grew and developed. The only difficulty in the way was Mr. Aymer. It was so impossible to know where to place him in our little family drama. He was neither a rival nor a jealous lover,—he was only a friend and pastor,—yet he certainly paid us more visits than pastors usually bestow upon their flock, and he was kinder, far kinder to me than I deserved, sometimes fairly frightening me into doing my duty for a season. Gradually I was learning to like him—though I don't think I would have acknowledged it except to the pages of this chronicle. If mother ever condescends to open and read it, and if I ever have the courage to let her, I wonder what she will think of her daughter Barbara !

One afternoon when Flo was standing irresolutely by the window, watching the men in the fields, and I was idling over a book, she turned around to me suddenly and said, 'Barbara dear, you might do me such a favor this morning, if you only would.'

I threw down my book in a minute. Flo rarely if ever asked favors, she was always conferring them instead.

'Anything you wish, Flo,' I said. 'I'm glad enough to have the opportunity ; only I do hope it won't be an errand to some old woman.'

She smiled and said, 'No, it is to a young one, dear, and a very poor, sad, young woman too. I hardly feel—' she hesitated a moment, and then added—'strong enough to go there this intensely hot morning, and yet I promised to see her and bring her some work, if I could get it.'

‘Don’t you feel well, Flo?’ I asked, stealing an arm around her waist.

‘Yes, but it is very hot and close, and walking tires me so much lately; besides you said you were going out to the cliffs, and it is only a little further. I am afraid we may have a shower, though.’

‘O no danger of that,’ I said cheerfully, ‘and I always have my umbrella. Get your things ready, Lady Bountiful, and let me be off.’

Fortunately it was not a package of flannel, or a basket of provision, but a message instead, to Matty Price. I knew the young woman very well to whom Flo referred. She had been married about two years before to an active, industrious fisherman, who had been lost in one of the early Spring gales, leaving her a young widow with a two months’ old baby, and nothing to live upon now that her main support was gone. From time to time the ladies of the parish would find washing, cleaning, or coarse sewing for her to do, and Flo had been one of those most interested in her sorrowful case.

I found her in her mother’s little house, a white-washed structure, more deserving the name of cabin than house, but scrupulously neat, and quite free of that disagreeable, all pervading smell of fish, which supplanted other odors in this vicinity. Poor girl! The brown hands that had been so busy in hauling the nets, were folded all too suddenly for her—folded, white and still—it must have been a hard thing to understand. She was rocking her baby in a rough wooden cradle, droning some sort of melancholy lullaby to it as she looked gloomily and wearily out over the cruel great ocean, that seemed mocking her to-day with its sunniest smile. She only noticed me by a nod as I came in at the door, then turn-

ed her eyes back to the water again ; but the old mother rose and gave me a seat, with a sort of disappointed look on her face when I told her from whom I came. I fancy that Flo's visits must have been the one stray gleam of sunshine that had penetrated into this dark and cheerless place. There was a little show of interest and brightening up of both faces when I told my errand ; she was to come up to the house for a couple of days of extra cleaning, and then Miss Wagner had some fine washing to give her. My heart ached for the poor young creature, and the little unconscious baby sleeping in the cradle. I had thought it a perfect bore when Flo asked me to go, but I lingered, talking to them both, and becoming interested, in spite of myself, in her pitiful story.

'It was only such a little while ago and we were so happy,' she said, shaking her head mournfully ; 'he wære such a kind lad, and for he to go down without a word o' warning—it were just awful—and baby and me a waitin' home,' and then she fell to crying over the little thing, while her mother, honest old soul, wiped her eyes and comforted her because it was God's will.

'As if it was His will I should break my heart,' the girl sobbed. 'Aye, aye ! you may all talk—it's the minister's way, and it's Miss Flo's way—they both mean well, but they don't none on 'em know.'

Her pitiful crying went to my heart. 'I am very sorry for you,' I said. 'Life is hard at the best,' with a sort of feeling that I knew nothing of its hardness, and was the last one in the world to venture such a remark to a sorrowing woman ; but she seized upon the idea eagerly.

'It's hard on us poor folks,' she said bitterly, 'and it may be to them that's finer flesh and blood. I'm not saying "There's woe and sorrow enough and to spare in the

world, and there's death ahead for us all." I don't expect to understand it.'

I felt the tears coming into my eyes as I looked from her down to the little white face of the sleeping baby. I wished that I could comfort her, but if Mr. Aymar and Flo had done her no good, what was there left for me to say? I rose to go, and then noticed for the first time how the brightness of the Summer day had suddenly been overcast. A storm was sweeping up from the east, and a faint mutter of thunder was heard in the distance.

'Better come back and wait,' said the old woman, following me to the door. 'A poor roof's better 'n none, and a rain what comes up quick, is soon over.'

'O I'll be home before a drop of rain falls,' I replied, hurrying away. 'I'm a good walker, and it is only a short distance, after all.'

'Aye, aye; it is a fine thing to be young—I was that myself once, and I minded a mile no more'n a step now,' I heard her say to herself as I turned away.

I had not walked far when the coming storm began to assert itself. First a sudden swaying of the trees, then a low moaning, then a stillness, followed by a louder outcry, warned me that it would be well to turn in somewhere for shelter, if possible. I had left all the cabins far behind in my rapid walk, and there was nothing before me but the long strip of beach and the rocks beyond. If there had been a cottage or even a boat near, some shelter that I might crawl under until the force of the storm had spent itself, but there was nothing of the kind in sight, and I hurried on. A little later and the ominous clouds resolved themselves to rain—a sudden, driving shower, that albeit it would soon be over, was none the less uncomfortable to be exposed to.

I stood for a moment under its full fury, wondering what I should do. Usually I was very indifferent to small inconveniences in the way of weather, but although I carried an umbrella, it was impossible to raise it in such a wind, and my hat was a flimsy fabric, not calculated to stand a drenching rain, while my shoes were so thin they were soaked in a minute. I stood quite still, pondering while the rain poured down pitilessly, reducing my hat to a gelatinous substance on my head, and my feet to the condition of scows, when I bethought myself of a shelter at the foot of the cliff, which had been our favorite resort, of late. Bob and Bess had discovered it one day, and had tried their best to imagine it a cave, but it was only a well worn fissure in the rock, a place that the waves had scooped out by constant fretting and beating. It could hold one or two persons quite comfortably, and at least would prove a screen in a pouring rain. I turned back instantly, and ran for it as fast as my wet garments would allow me; but not too soon, for down came the rain pelting upon me with such violence that my limp hat lay like a battered ruin against my cheeks. In another instant I dashed into the cave, and almost into the arms of Neal Huntington. The tremor from running, as well as the surprise, made me quite speechless, and putting my hand upon my heart, I panted, gasped, and finally burst into a long laugh.

‘I was just wishing for some one,’ he said; ‘it was beginning to be awfully doleful in here. I’m so glad you thought of this place. How did you know anything about it, though?’

‘Bess told me; we were reconnoitering one day, and she found it. She plays gipsy here, but Flo and I go up higher and take the cliff.’

'Your sister always takes the higher ground in everything, does she not?' he said; 'but this is my place. I may come here sometimes and look up at her as she walks so far above—like the man in the Bible who was in torment and lifted up his eyes. O you think I am irreverent, do you? then I shall be sure to stop; but your sister would not think so, Miss Barbara.'

'My sister has remarkable ideas, sometimes,' I said stiffly; 'I am not as good as she, but I think she is too lenient by far to you.'

'To me?' and he opened his blue eyes wide in surprise.

'Yes, to you,' I answered pertly. 'She won't acknowledge that you are in error—we've discussed you many, many times. I'm always down on you—you know that. I have been ever since that day when you made me miserable with your idle humbugging. I shall never forget it; but Flo excuses all your misdemeanors.'

'Miss Florilla is very good,' he said, with sudden gravity; 'but see how wet you are. Your hat—'

'Is nothing but a pancake now,' I said ruefully, turning it on my hand; nevertheless he took it from me, gave it a good shake, together with my silk cape that hung like a rag about my shoulders.

'You needn't mind about that,' said I, 'the thing is utterly spoiled—nothing short of a miracle could restore it.'

He stood looking down upon me a moment, and then he made me sit upon a stone while he took off his coat and wrapped it about me, in spite of my protestations.

'Now let me look at your feet,' he commanded.

'You can't do anything here,' I laughed as I thrust forward two shapeless things that looked as if they had been dipped in black glue and come out worse for the dipping.

‘I have a great mind to offer you my boots, only I know they would be too small for you—but what shall we do? Do you know you will certainly take cold?’

‘I never took a cold in my life, and I do not know you at all in this new character of knight and cavalier. It is the very first time that you were ever polite to me, and it is almost embarrassing—pray do not give yourself so much trouble.’

‘O I’d always be civil to you if you would only do the fair thing by me, once in a way. I always intended to be polite and considerate of ladies’ feelings, until you gave me that delicious chance for a tease at Mrs. Desmond’s. Now that we know each other so well, I don’t mind telling you that I go off into fits sometimes even now, as I recall the expression of your face when I mentioned Mrs. Desmond as my aunt.’

I looked up at him with what I intended for a withering glance, but I changed my mind, and we both laughed until the old rocks rung.

‘Any one would think we were a couple of children,’ he said, ‘to hear us laughing, and yet I never felt less like it in my life. Do you know, before you dashed in here and surprised me nearly out of my wits, I was making a mental calculation of what practical use I was in the world, and wondering’—here he became a little embarrassed—‘if any one would be the better off for my existence. Don’t you see?—it comes rough on a young fellow, with no belongings in the world, to drift along through life with no one to care for him.’

‘Why do you drift, then? Why not stop now and moor your boat somewhere. Such a very elegant young man as Mr. Neal Huntington might land at almost any point in the stream and find moorings.’

‘O nonsense, now ! I feel like being sensible.’

‘It must be an odd sensation.’

‘It is ; for once I am tired of being idle and good for nothing.’

‘Why do you not go to the other extreme, then, and be of some practical use in the world ? One can’t live on delusive theories all one’s life.’

‘I never tried either theory or practice,’ he said, stooping to pick up a pebble and cast it out on the sand. ‘I believe I have lived in a state of simple passivity. It has always been so with me, you know,—up to this time I mean. I feel now as if this sort of thing must end, and I can’t quite go back on the old beaten track.’

‘Why should you wish to ?’

‘I don’t ; I only keep on because I don’t know what else to do—my future seems like that,’ pointing to the mist that hung over sea and sky ; ‘just about as uncertain and vague. But if I ever do rouse myself and amount to something, it will be because I have been allowed to be upon such an intimate footing in your mother’s household, and because I have before me continually the beauty of Miss Flo’s life.’

He had seated himself on the stone by my side when he put his coat about me, but now he rose, walking nervously up and down the narrow space before me ; yet I could see, in the uncertain light, the quick look of gladness that flushed his face as he spoke Flo’s name. Perhaps our fairy tale was coming true ! Perhaps he really loved Flo, and I had not been such a silly dreamer, after all !—yet I would not, from very perversity, let him see that I was glad ; he should not think we were so willing to give up our beautiful sister to the first one who was ready to appreciate her.

‘Flo’s life is so perfect,’ I said, ‘it can’t help doing good in the world. Every one admires her.’

‘But I love her,’ he said suddenly, blushing all over his handsome face. ‘I don’t mind telling you at all, only I am quite certain you have known it all along. I only wish I were as sure that she cared anything for me.’

I made no reply to this outburst. Now that I actually knew the truth, I was quite surprised to see how coolly I could take it.

After a minute’s silence he said, ‘And you haven’t a word to give me for this confidence, Miss Barbara? I did think you might tell me whether you were glad or sorry, and—By Jove! you don’t think it is Aymar she likes, after all?’

‘I am sure I don’t know,’ I answered. ‘He comes to the house a great deal.’

‘But he comes as a clergyman.’

‘Clergymen are human beings,’ I said bluntly; ‘they are quite as apt to fall in love as idle young men; and devout young women, like Flo for instance, are quite as apt to like them as to throw away their affection upon a silly boy. Don’t look at me in that way with such a despairing expression of face,’ I went on. ‘I don’t think Flo cares for you at all—I hope she does not, for I am sure you are not worthy of her; not that I absolutely dislike you—I understand you a little better than I did at that dreadful garden party of Mrs. Desmond’s; but you are not worthy of her—no one is,’ I ended warmly.

‘I acknowledge that, Miss Barbara, I acknowledge my own inferiority; I never feel it so keenly as when I am with her. She is the only woman who ever made me long to be good and have an aim and purpose in life. You will not believe me—but if God only gives her to

me, I will serve Him all my life as truly as I love her.'

'I do not believe in such a religion,' I said, 'and I am still more sure that Flo will not. The idea of becoming pious because one is in love. That is just like you.'

'It is not like me at all,' he argued soberly. 'It is very unlike the Neal Huntington of six months ago, to desire a change for the better; but I have been unconsciously led to long for holy things because of the beautiful example before me. She has been all the world to me in this short time,' and his voice trembled as he spoke. 'I had never any high conceptions of life here, and I never thought of the life hereafter until I knew her. Now it seems to me that if I ever gain heaven, it will be because she will lead me thither. Do you think I am wicked? Do you think it wrong that I should be so presumptuous? And yet you don't know how eagerly I am seeking for everything that it is good. It seems so easy for some people, their lives are just laid out like a map, and from the very beginning they never have any trouble.'

'But the lines on a map are not all even and pleasant to trace out—the rivers run zigzag, and are hard to follow up.'

'Yes, I know; but they are marked out plain and clear, and all they have got to do is flow on—the little streams empty into the big rivers, and the big rivers are lost in the ocean.'

'You can stop there,' I said; 'they are not lost—they go on to swell the seas. I think there is something beautiful in being a tributary, if one can't be a big river or an ocean.'

'I'd be glad if I could be anything,' he said, dropping his face in his hands. 'And I do wish you could tell me what to do.'

‘I ? I’m the last one to advise. I’m in a mental quagmire nearly all the time, myself. I think you had better go to Flo at once.’

‘Do you think it could be a possible thing that she cares for me ?’

‘It wouldn’t be impossible ; most women like their inferiors. I think I should try some surer way than speculating upon it in this damp place, and running the risk of rheumatism and catarrh. I am going home.’

‘Don’t go ; it is such a comfort to talk to you, in spite of your perversity. It is raining yet.’

‘No, it is not.’

We both peered forward, and I held out a hand to see if there were any drops.

‘No, it is all over, and I must hurry home. I shall give you back your coat now.’

‘But you will take cold.’

‘No, I will not; and do you suppose I would walk along the road with this coat of yours thrown around me ? You are the most absurd boy. However, you have been very kind for once in your life. I suppose I shall have to be polite and thank you. Now I will go home through the lane back of the house—no one will see me, and I shall run every step of the way. Good bye.’

He turned around and gave me his hand : ‘Good-bye, Barbara, I am going to call you that now. I never thought to have had this talk with you ; say nothing about it, please, to any one.’

‘O I tell Meg everything,’ I said. ‘You wont mind my telling Meg.’

‘Indeed I do ; promise that you will not say a word to her ?’

All right, then. I dare say I shall never think of

it again. We always have so much nonsense to discuss, I consider it a duty to get it out of my mind as soon as possible. Here's your coat.'

He put on the coat that I handed him, and came out of the cave with me. Perhaps it was the uncertain twilight hue within that made his face so pale, but I was almost sure that the blue eyes were full of tears. What a strange thing for a man !

'See, the sun is shining,' I said quickly ; 'you can take that for a good omen. And there is a strip of blue sky—the first thing you know there'll be a rainbow.'

For while we had been talking the clouds had parted, and a cleft of pale Summer sunshine fluttered down over the wet meadows and muddy roads. The sea still lay shrouded in cold, leaden shadows, but the strip of blue sky was gradually widening overhead, and a faint flush of rose color stealing into the dull gray.

'I suppose you must go,' said my companion, rousing himself. 'Think what you please of me and my confession. I shall not change my mind if I live to be a Methusaleh.'

'And nobody wants you to, my dear,' I said to myself ; and then aloud, 'Good-bye, and come up after tea,' and I waved my battered hat as he disappeared around the other side of the rocks, walking rapidly toward the place where his yacht was moored. He was not whistling or singing, as was his wont, and I scarcely knew him in this altered mood : but as for me, I literally danced instead of running all the way back to Cloverly. To think that, after all, my dreams were coming true !

I looked back when I reached the stile leading over into the garden back of the house. The clouds were scattered and broken, and the west was red with sunset glow. The world behind me was in a blaze of glory, but before

me, like a vague premonition of what was yet to be, the cold gray shadows lay without a glint of the beauty that was dying with the day.

As I dashed up the steps of the piazza, who should come forward to meet me but Flo and Mr. Aymar.

‘My dear Barbara,’ said Flo in her tender way, ‘I have been so worried. Were you at Matty Price’s all the time, or were you out in the shower?’

‘Shower?’ I said curtly, ‘it was an inundation—a second flood, and I was one of the wicked ones left outside to perish. Please let me pass, Mr. Aymar. I shall give you your death if I attempt to shake hands.’

Nevertheless he followed me into the hall,—he took my hand in spite of my refusal,—‘I hope you will not take cold,’ he said in his low, earnest voice, ‘but I cannot refrain from telling you how happy you make me, now that you are interesting yourself in the poor people down at the shore. I am sure that they will love you when they know you.’

‘They never will get the chance,’ and I pulled my hand rudely away. ‘I am never going to do a good deed again. I detest Matty Price and the whole lot, and I am sure I have taken my death.’

‘I am very sorry,’ he said gravely, and then he went back to Flo.

‘The presumption of a man!’ I exclaimed angrily to myself as I dressed for tea. ‘The idea of his being with Flo, when it is Neal Huntington’s place.’

But when I came down to the dining-room, Mr. Aymar had gone, and Flo could give no reason why he had not staid to tea.

‘He certainly accepted my invitation when he came, said that innocent young woman.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CLOUDING OF THE SKY.

Flo began to act very strangely about this time, and from being much among our friends and neighbors gradually quite withdrew from society, avoiding company, and going off by herself to visit among the fishers' families, whose little brown huts and cabins adorned the shore; or she would walk out, as far as she was able, on the bold cliffs, and sit there alone most of the day, if we would let her, gazing out, not so much at the sea itself, as at the uncertain haze between it and the sky,—the point where nothing was to be seen, and everything left to the widest conjecture. The water lapped softly upon the sands below, the fishing boats came in and out, the far-away white sails skimmed the water like sea gulls on the wing, and the vague whisperings of the sea were almost the only sounds that stole up to her as she sat there alone. What was she thinking of? When we would ask her she would smile, and say that she had a great deal to think over, and she liked to be alone. And Flo's conduct was not the only mystery that was under family discussion—Mr. Huntington conducted himself almost as strangely as Flo. He came to the house incessantly after our little confidences that rainy day under the cliff,—came with the most assured, boyishly happy manner, so that I was forced to the conclusion that all his fears had been laid aside; then he would stay away for days at a time, would be feverishly excited when he came, or run to the other extreme and be in the depths of gloom. I got weary of watching the two, and concluded there

must have been some lovers' quarrel. To be sure no one had ever quarrelled with Flo since she had been able to speak, but, as I argued, that was always the way they did in books, and now that Flo had a lover she must needs have her quarrel, like all the rest of the world. But the explanation I made myself did not satisfy me. I had a sort of inner consciousness there was something more than a trifling quarrel under it all.

One morning—all too soon—the end of this long suspense came. Flo and I were in the parlor, the doors and windows all standing open, and the light wind coming in slow, lazy puffs, through the half closed venetian blinds. I sat on the floor, dawdling over a crayon sketch. It was too warm to go up in my garret. Meg was in her room, singing blithely as a bird while she basted the ruffles on a new lawn. Flo was at her daily practice, but she seemed a trifle weary and distraught over it. She would play a few bars, languidly enough, then stop, turning over the leaves of her music-book slowly, searching for something she could not find,—touching the keys softly and idly,—breaking into little trills and roulades, as if seized by sudden impulse, or just as suddenly dropping her hands in her lap, as if she were weary of it all.

To this day I can see her sitting there, her hands fallen in her lap, mother sewing contentedly in the room beyond, while Bess, curled up on a sofa, read Cinderella with all the angles of her face drawn into rigid sympathy with that unfortunate young damsel's woes. I remember that I looked furtively up from my drawing, with an undefined feeling in my heart that she was too beautiful and good for this world. Her face was turned away, the light fell in upon her golden hair and danced in sunshiny ripples up and down upon her white dress.

Yes, Flo was unconsciously a work of art as she sat there with her slender fingers resting on the keys, her long dress sweeping about her, her hair catching the light and shining like gold. I seem to scent the blossoms now as the wind drifted in through the open windows, softly bearing with it a pleasant nameless odor of flowers, and the birds chirped and twittered outside.

Presently, while a little thread of melody stole out from under her fingers, she turned her head, glancing through the open doorway at mother sewing in the broad window. 'Barbara,' she said softly, 'does this sea air make you feel tired and sleepy, or does the feeling rest with me alone?'

'Why, it makes me feel strong, Flo,' I answered. 'I take such long clear breaths,—it wakes me up, I think.'

'I wonder,' she went on in a lower voice, 'why I feel so drowsy, and as if I were in a dream all the time.'

I put a few bold strokes on my old monk's head before I replied, 'It's time you woke up, then, my dear,—you've been dreaming your dream ever since I've known you.'

She smiled in my face absently. 'Have I, dear? I wish I could wake up,' then turned again to the piano and let her fingers dally idly among the keys.

'Don't waste your time, Flo, my child,' called out mother cheerily, lifting her head from a long contemplation of one of Bob's socks minus a heel, which gave her calm nature possibly just enough sense of irritation to hurry Flo a little. 'Your father is paying out a good deal for lessons just now,—only improve your time and we will both be content.'

Flo's color came and went, she struck a few chords, then left the piano and went in to mother. 'I wish you'd give Bess the lessons,' she said hurriedly, 'the

child has a real talent for music, and—I don't want to take lessons any more—won't you, mother? Really, it would be best.'

'Florilla Fox!' and mother raised her eyes in amazement. 'You who are so fond of music,—and you never used to mind the practice when we were in the city,—why do you care for it here? I didn't want to scold you, darling, only to rouse you a little,'—then, as Flo said nothing in reply, mother went on: 'Flo, dear, is anything wrong? are you sure you are well?'

'No, mother; I'm not sure at all.'

'What is it, darling?' folding both hands swiftly over her work and eyeing her keenly.

'I don't know, mother dear,—that's just it—I'm tired,—sleepy most of the time. I think it is the sea; but Barbara says she don't feel so, and Meg is as bright as a lark,—things tire me; and now this practice,—I don't want to be vacillating,' she went on, 'but I'd like to put off the lessons through the warm weather, or let Bess take them in my place.'

'Bess is too young, and we haven't the money to throw away,' said mother shaking her head. 'I'm glad you told me, daughter; of course you need not feel bound to go on. But you are sure you are not ill?'

'O no, mother; just tired.'

'It's weakness,' she determined in her brisk motherly way. 'I'll order some iron to-morrow, and you must be in the open air all the time—time will bring things around right. Shut up the piano now, dearie, and you and Barbara go out to the grove, or on the cliffs. Take your umbrellas—it's very hot walking through the sand--and stay out all the morning, if you like.'

'Let's take our work,' I suggested, putting aside my

crayons ; 'and, mother, give me the stocking basket, and you take a respite, just for a surprise.'

'No, no, Bab ; I understand poor Bobbie's heels better than any one. What a boy he is to go through stockings, to be sure.'

'Never mind ; I can understand them too. Bob and I are sympathetic on that point. He is a perfect—Achilles, I was going to say—wasn't it Achilles who was vulnerable in his heel ? However, it wouldn't be safe for me to affirm. It might turn out to be somebody else. Consider that allusion unmade, Mrs. Fox,' as I tucked the basket under my arm.

Flo smiled faintly, submitted to a searching look from mother, as she put on her broad hat and turned to go.

'Take a book, Florilla Fox,' I begged. 'Let's have a feast of reason and a flow of soul, if I am to study domestic economy,' so she slipped a small volume in her pocket and took her umbrella in her thin white hand. Perhaps the reason that I noticed it to-day was that it looked so very white and slender as it supported the black handle of her umbrella, and for the first time I felt a sort of chilly wonder if Flo were really going to be sick. Other people had sickness, yes, sickness and death in their families—it couldn't be possible that we were always going on in this steady fashion, the circle unbroken year after year. I wondered if mother had thought of it, and involuntarily I turned and looked back. She was standing in the window just where we had left her, shading her eyes with her hand, and watching us, of course. What a mother she was ! Then she waved her handkerchief and turned away, and we walked on to our favorite resting place. I seated myself on the warm grass and took out my basket of stockings ; Flo sat down

at the foot of a pine tree ; we did not seem inclined to talk at all—it was enough to look, that day. There was a blue, hazy mist, that made a perpetual mystery of the great beyond, out of which now and then a white sail flitted like a beckoning hand, and then shrouded itself again in the mystery, disappearing entirely, dropping down as it were into an under world. Below us a sweep of clear water rolled over the black rocks, toppling backward in long lines of seething foam, before it swept up the white sand and died away in a dreary moan. The sweet winds blew from far over the sea, and tossed Flo's hair about her face ; she put it back, leaning her head upon her hand and looking out still, as if she were trying to follow the beckoning hand. I worked diligently upon my stockings, looking up furtively now and again, and wondering why she was so absorbed. There was no sound but the murmur of the waves fretting the sands below and the flutter of the leaves, as sometimes Flo roused herself and turned page after page. But she did not read, and finally, with a long sigh, she threw down her book and walked into the wood, coming back with her lap full of daisies and small white flowers, which she began quietly to make up into a wreath for my hat.

‘Flo, what makes you so quiet to day ?’ I asked finally, in a desperate attempt to gain her confidence. The tears sprang into my eyes when I asked her, but I steadily ignored the feeling, and pressed my question still further. ‘You are not yourself lately. You are absorbed in some new thought. You don't take Meg and me, or even your own mother in your confidence as you used. It was only such a little while ago,’ I said with a half-way feeling of bitterness in my heart against Neal Huntington, as if he were the sole cause of our undefined anxieties, ‘that you

never had a secret from us, even in thought—it is only since we came to the country that you are so changed.’

I paused again, but she answered nothing, only folded one hand softly over the other, in a distressed kind of way, that had lately become a sort of habit with her.

‘I have guessed what it is,’ my cheeks flushing as I went on ; ‘but you ought to be the one to speak of it first, and not I—and mother ought to know. Mr. Huntington as good as told me,’ I blurted out, ‘that day we met in the cave when it rained.’

‘Mr. Huntington—told—you?’ Flo echoed after me, looking up in a dazed kind of way. ‘Barbara, dear, what could he possibly have to say about me?’

‘A very great deal,’ I said, dashing into the subject *in medias res*. ‘You know he adores you, Flo—he as good as claimed me for a sister that day of the rain ; and I am sure I love him as one already, although we are never so happy as when we are quarrelling. You needn’t think I am not delighted, for I am—it is all right that he should love you ; indeed, I do not see how he can help himself,’ with a little burst of effusion. ‘If I were a man I would have done the same thing ages ago ; but I do think it is a little underhanded that you haven’t given us an inkling of the truth, too.’

While I had been talking she had turned away, making lines in the earth with the point of her umbrella—smooth, straight lines, one after the other, with the greatest regularity and precision, as if she were wholly absorbed in it. It was the first time in my life that I had ever attempted to speak upon such a subject to Flo, and it was strange to notice the painful shadow that seemed to come between us, and overcast her face. The tears filled her eyes, but she only said,

‘O I wish I could tell you all, Barbara.’

‘Well,’ I cried with a half laugh, ‘don’t fidget, but sit still and tell me about it—not that we don’t know—why, Meg and I made up a fairy tale two months ago, and it is all turning out just as we expected. It would be a comfort though to hear it from your own lips.’

But her voice was scarcely more than a whisper when she began, pulling the white petals of the daisies slowly, one by one, then tossing them away with a weary sigh, as if she cast them aside with all her hopes and fears. ‘When they come again, Barbara, I won’t be here. It isn’t any earthly love, darling, that has been drawing my thoughts away from you all—it is only that I have been trying to make myself ready to go away—to go away and be with Christ—which is far better—’ she added softly. ‘You have seen it. You must have seen it, although I haven’t dared say the words,’ she faltered, while I stared at her helplessly, waiting to hear more, and yet feeling in the awful suddenness of the shock a conviction that somehow I had known how it would be all along—it must have been, as she said, a fixed fact in my mind, a sort of undercurrent in all my plans of the future, a consciousness that we are apt to call a presentiment, when in fact it is a whisper direct from God bidding us be ready.

‘O Flo! you shall not think of such things,’ drawing a long breath; ‘it is not so. You are all wrong, Flo—who put such ideas in your head? Have you asked advice of any one?’

‘I didn’t need any one to tell me,’ she said, with signs of an inward struggle; ‘I found it out myself.’

‘Ah, I knew it was not so—you are only nervous,’ I went on, with that instinctive denial of coming death,

which is always our first thought. 'I will tell father and mother, and you must have a doctor.'

'I did have one, dear—that is I went one day to a strange doctor when I was in the city. He told me nothing, however, that I did not know before. I wanted to tell you. I have thought it over so much when I was alone, and wondered what I had better do about telling mother—because—because it can't be helped, you know; it is my heart, the doctor said—'

'You mean that you are going to die, Flo!' I cried, forcing the words out in desperate agony, 'that the doctors have told you so. O my darling, it must not be—it cannot be! And what a happy life we were planning for you, only a few days ago—and Neal Huntington. You must know, Flo, how he loves you.'

'God seldom gives us the things that in our blindness we are apt to call blessings,' she said softly. 'I love him, and I love you all—perhaps even I have longed sometimes to stay. I am sorry for you always, and sometimes I am sorry for myself too. I used to plan such plans, and dream such dreams, dear. You know you always called me an old castle-builder,—call me so still, darling, only the dream is coming true this time. Life has been very sweet to me,' she went on in a low wrapt voice, with eyes still looking out upon the mystery of sea and sky, and beckoning hand, 'but it was very foolish to plan out a world for myself; and we shall all be together again in a little while.'

Flo couldn't get any further, she had to *think* the rest out, and I could not say one word. Her thoughts only touched me as they went by,—just as the Raiment touched the poor woman and blessed her with its healing,—so Flo's words, like all the acts of her gentle life, touch

me as they pass. Even in my agony, I wondered if any of the healing and the blessedness of her pure example could reach me.

‘Sometimes I tremble at the thought,’ she went on, as I still sat silent, ‘but I do not think it is with fear. I ought not to be afraid when the promise is so sure. And if the river is dark and cold, other feet than mine have stepped into it before. What a strange, strange company, have crossed—some doubting—others rejoicing—some—can it be—in fear?’

I tried to speak, but the words seemed to choke me, and Flo leaned over me stroking my hair. ‘Try to be thankful, Barbara. There will be five left for mother—I think you can make her content, for I shall have been given the greatest blessing of you all.’

‘And you dare to think that God is good to rend us apart and break our hearts? O Flo! Flo! you shall not die, my darling,—you shall live and be happy,’ I cried in utter abandonment of grief, but Flo put up her hand and stopped me with a smile.

‘I do not ask for length of days now,’ she said. ‘I am very happy in thinking that my life will be short,—at the best it is a dream, you know,—a mere dream,—and some day I want you to try and tell Neal how willing I am to have it ordered thus for me. You can do it now, Barbara, since he has spoken to you of me, for he will not listen to a word of mine. I have tried so many times, dear, but I had not the courage that I have with you to-day. And it would make him so miserable, if I were to tell him all. You see I shall have to leave it for you. I had a hope once as fair as any that ever gladdened mortal woman. I know Neal loves me, though we have never told each other in words—it did not seem a thing that

was needed—we understood each other—though he is very unhappy now—and I think—I think—it is because he knows the truth. God has been very good in giving us so many happy years together, and now this crowning love of all—so good that sometimes I have almost forgotten that it is for a brief space, a few hours of time, and that here we can have no abiding city or continuing place. And now, dear, it is getting cooler, and we can go home. We have had our talk, and since I have told you, we can speak of it often and not be afraid.'

'But it cannot be,' I said, 'it cannot be true. I shall tell mother, and you must have a doctor,—you will do that, Flo?'

'I will do anything she wants me to do,' she answered; 'and you can tell her—I do not want to—dear mother. And yet she will be better able to bear it than any of you, for it was she who taught me, when I was a little child, that we were only pilgrims journeying on to a better country. Yes, mother will know—you will not have to comfort her. And do not cry, Barbara dear,' she said tossing the flowers from her lap. She rose, standing for an instant as she always stood in church, with her head bowed, as if afar off she had heard some invisible Gloria; then she stretched out her arms as if she were clasping some tangible help close to her heart. 'Think how it will really be with me hereafter!' she said softly. 'Think of that, dear, and I am sure it will make you, as it does me, quite happy.'

I could not answer. I thought I would give anything to be alone, away from Flo's questioning eyes. I wanted to think it all over. How hard it was to listen to her and say nothing, as she wandered off into those religious speculations, founded upon a strong faith, that

had always filled her mind and proved such a stay and comfort to her. We walked on, she talking and I listening, following the windings of the path down the steep cliff, with our arms about each other, and our hearts very full. I had no eyes for the beauty of the landscape now, no ears for the soft murmur of the waves; I only thought, with an agony of fear, what if Flo's words should really be true.

There was company in the parlor with mother when we reached home, and Meg was away somewhere with Bella Desmond, so that it was not until after tea I had a chance to get her alone by myself.

'Do come out with me a minute, Meg,' I whispered, 'I have something to tell you. Come outside with me on the porch, or up in our room.'

'It must be something important,' said Meg with a laugh on her lips. 'You look as grave as a judge about it. No, I'll not come up-stairs—it's too hot. I'll be outside presently.'

So I went on the porch, and sat down under the vines alone by myself. I could hear them all talking and laughing outside, just as carelessly and happily as if no dark shadow lay over the pleasant home; even Flo,—how could she do it? yet her voice was just as sweet and unmoved as if this trial were not before her. What a wonderful religion Flo's was, and how hard for me to understand.

'What are you dreaming about now, Barbara?'

I looked up and saw Neal Huntington coming up the walk. I had been so absorbed in my anxious thoughts that I had not heard his footfall. 'O you are the very one I want to see,' I cried; 'come up here and sit down on the steps by me. I want to see you, and I don't want

to see you. I have been thinking all the afternoon that I must tell you something, and yet I do not dare.'

'Don't tell me it is about Flo,' he said quickly, putting his hand out on mine. 'O Barbara! I have been so happy and so miserable, alternately, ever since that rainy day when we had our talk. I can hardly define it to myself, and yet I will not let her speak and tell me what it is.'

'But you will have to know one of these days,' I said, dropping my face in my hands and crying for the first time. 'Flo has been telling me all about it. O my dear, she loves you, and so do we all. I have never meant half of the foolish chaffing I have indulged in. I love you like a brother already. But Flo is not well—she thinks she is going to die—she told me so herself this morning, and I have been so wretched all day. Just listen! hear them talking—Flo too, just as sweetly and calmly as if she had not said those dreadful words to-day. O Neal, my heart is breaking when I think perhaps it may be true.'

'Hush!' he said passionately, 'it is not true. It shall not be true if devotion and care can save her. I have come up to-night to talk with your father about it. She must have advice—the very best. And yet, O Barbara, I have wondered a great deal why she grew more saintly and holy day by day—why, when I loved her the most, the gulf seemed widening that kept us apart.'

'I thought I heard voices, and I fancied you and Barbara were here,' said Flo, stepping out of the long window on the porch, and looking uncertainly around; then seeing us both on the step, and Neal's face hidden in his hands, she came up to us quickly, dropping down on her knees between us, and putting one hand out upon his shoulder, 'Are you two talking about me?'

‘O my darling!’ said Neal, brokenly, taking up the slender white hand and putting it to his lips.

She bent her pretty head toward him, speaking tenderly and softly as to a child. ‘I have been telling Barbara to-day what I have tried to tell you so many times. The doctors have told me now, Neal. I went to see a strange doctor, as I told you I should, and I dare not deceive you or myself. It would be sweet to stay; but it will not be like parting forever—we shall meet in such a little while.’

‘You mean that we shall meet in heaven,’ he said slowly in a dazed, wondering way; ‘but it is heaven to me now, when you are here. I do not want that other heaven where you can be nothing to me more than a shadowy spirit.’

‘Hush!’ she whispered. ‘It breaks my heart to hear you talk thus. I do love you, but there is a love that is better than yours, Neal, and a home that is surer and safer than this. I lie awake at night often, and wonder that God has been so good. I never thought to have a life so free of sorrow and pain—to have my dear ones all around me. I never dreamed of this crowning seal to my happiness, the certainty of your love. And it will not die, as I shall die—it will live and go on forever and ever. We have an eternity before us, and the world where we shall spend it will be far more perfect and beautiful than this.’

I got up hastily, choking back my tears, and went into the parlor, where Meg was standing by the open window, looking out at the stars and humming a little tune, lost in thought, and quite unconscious of the misery that we had been enduring. She turned around when she saw me.

‘O here you are. I was just coming in search of you.

But it's so lovely—just listen, can't you hear the waves ? It's the sweetest sound I ever heard at this distance.'

'O Meg,' I exclaimed, 'I've so wanted to see you all day.'

'Yes, so you did ; I quite forgot about it. Well, what is your wonderful secret ? Out with it—you never kept anything a whole day to yourself before. It must be something a little beyond the ordinary run of your mysteries.'

'Don't jest,' I said, inexpressibly shocked at her levity. 'It seems to me impossible that you cannot have seen it all along. You are usually so quick, and now you are blind.'

'Is it that trumpery old belief of yours about Flo and Neal Huntington ? Why, any one with half an eye could see how that was going to end.'

'O Meg,' I cried, 'can't you see that Flo is not long for this world ? She is dying ! If ever death was written on any face, it is on our Flo's. It is horrible to me that no one sees it, and yet I sometimes believe you all think it as much as I, only you don't dare acknowledge it, even in thought.'

'Flo dying ' our Flo ? ' She uttered the words as if she were half stunned by the suddenness of the shock, then turned away from me and burst into a passion of tears. 'Who told you ? ' she said. 'Some one must have spoken of it to you, and put the thought in your head. It is very wrong and foolish. I don't know why I should cry just for your saying it—the heat of the Summer has prostrated her.'

'Flo told me herself,' I said vehemently. 'She knows she cannot live long. She has been to see a doctor, and he says it is trouble with her heart. I think she has

been making up her mind to it all along, and she has not wanted any of us to know.'

'And how did she come to tell you, then?'

'I don't know. It seemed to be as unexpected to her as to me. Perhaps she would not have said a word but for my telling her something that Mr. Huntington said to me the day that it rained and we were in the cave together.'

'And why don't you tell mother?'

'O Meg—I must, I suppose. Flo wanted me to—but I do so dread it. I thought I would ask you what it was best to do.'

'Do?' said the energetic Meg. 'Why we will consult a physician right away. Mother shall know, and it must be looked into at once. I dare say Flo isn't well, and is nervous and low-spirited. I shall tell mother this very minute.'

And Meg dashed off up stairs, leaving me in a more hopeful frame of mind than I had been in any time during the day.



CHAPTER XIV.

OUT OF TUNE.

Life wasn't quite the same thing after all this.

A miserable unrest possessed me after Flo had unburdened her heart and told me her fears. It quickened my pulses with a nameless thrill when I thought about it, my sleep was broken by troubled dreams, and my days made anxious by the perpetual fears that haunted me. I said to myself she was looking better; her old lassitude and weariness seemed at times almost gone, but yet, while the sweet blue eyes were looking at us without a taint of fear, I knew, with a pang unspeakable, that she was fading slowly away before our very eyes; that a dark, bitter hour was coming, and yet we had to smile and be cheerful, lest by any betrayal of grief we should shorten the brief space in which we might be together.

Meg had fully aroused both father and mother. The doctor was sent for the very next morning after mother had been told, and he entered into an examination of her case at once. 'A good, well-meaning man,' Neal said, 'but with very limited ideas. A city doctor—not one of them, but several—must be consulted,' and so he brought down two or three distinguished men from the city, and it was found that Flo had been correct. There was some organic difficulty about the heart. There were learned terms enough used to make it seem quite a complicated and altogether incomprehensible disease, but we all understood it well enough, and it meant simply this: with care and avoidance of excitement, she could live for a long time—even years it might be; such difficulties had

been overcome, out-grown entirely; but on the other hand, the delicate little machinery that kept life going, might at any moment stop. After all their explanations, unintelligible technicalities, and high sounding Latin phrases thrown in, it amounted to the same thing: there was an insidious *something* at work, sapping and mining as it were, the very mainspring of life. The doctors might as well have staid away. It only utterly befogged us, made Flo more positive in her belief, and Neal Huntington more wretched than he dared confess, though he pretended to the most overflowing spirits and inordinate gaiety. Of course we all knew it was to hide the deeper feeling beneath, and perhaps the only thing that really was clear in the whole matter, was his love for Flo and her unaccountable affection for him.

‘The dearest boy in the world,’ mother said approvingly, ‘but I was never more completely surprised in my life. I always thought Flo would fancy a clergyman. Now here was Mr. Aymar coming to the house all the time, and just the very person one would think to suit such a temperament as Flo’s, and it seems she prefers this rattle-brained boy.’

‘But mother,’ I said, fighting Neal’s battles when he was not by to hear, ‘he is not a rattle-brained boy any longer—he is so good and earnest and true; I am sure she can make him anything she chooses him to be; and Mr. Aymar isn’t worthy of such a woman as Flo.’

‘Mr. Aymar!’ and mother lifted her hands in astonishment, ‘that shows, my dear Barbara, you know nothing about your pastor. He is one among ten thousand; a man that I should be proud to say—’

‘O mother,’ I interrupted impatiently, ‘that’s enough. Don’t think me impertinent, but you might at least spare

me. I am sick unto death of hearing his praises and his name,' and I put my fingers in my ears that I might not be utterly overwhelmed.

As for Flo she bore the decision of the physicians with the quiet air of one who had already made up her mind, and it mattered very little what any one said about it. She did not give up her duties and settle down at home because she had been cautioned against exertion and excitement, although she was content to continue her old pursuits with more moderation; besides she had Neal to help her. He was always at church now, taking part in her little charities, carrying her basket, her books, or roll of work, talking to her favorite old women, and making friends of the men, though indeed the merry light-hearted fellow had made strong friends among them when he first came, and his engagement with the beautiful young lady, who was already regarded as something beyond an ordinary mortal, only threw an additional charm around him. He had, beside this, a way of dealing in the most wonderful surprises for the bare-footed children and garrulous grandfathers who swarmed along the shore. I don't think his gifts were always as judicious as they might have been, his staple commodities consisting mainly of plugs of tobacco and sticks of candy, together with a fair sprinkling of half-pence and marbles. He carried them about loose in his capacious pockets, like a great overgrown boy—as I told him; but some allowance must be made for a young fellow desperately in love. It is a mild form of insanity, I suppose, and one that don't always take the form of generosity; so we only treated ourselves to a furtive smile now and again.

Flo seemed very happy, and as the long beautiful Summer waned, and she grew no worse, we began to think it

was as Neal persistently argued—time and care would save her yet. Yes, those were happy days, even with the one dark shadow in the background, for we resolutely made a background of it. It is a good way to dispose of an anxiety, put it behind you. It don't help matters to drag up all the worries of life and make sorrows of them before the appointed time, and if we wait—wait patiently for God's time—He may one day touch those sorrows with His recreating finger, just as He once touched the chaos and darkness of the unformed world with the words 'Let there be light.' Some way it was always light with Flo, as if perhaps she heard before we did; and what to us was the merest whisper, to her was the spoken word. Yes, Flo was happy, but she was changed. There was the same lovely flush on her cheeks, it is true, but it came and went—it did not stay. If she were excited or busy her cheeks were crimson; but in the morning she was very pale, and after a long ride or walk she seemed tired, breathed quickly with a panting, frightened breath, and often I saw her involuntarily put her hand over her heart. But her eyes shone as steadily and sweetly as ever, and a something purer, holier, and far away, seemed to pervade her. We had jestingly called her our saint—now we trembled to but think it, for it did not seem as if a saint could be very different in look, in manner or holy speech than our Flo.

We staid much at home and were very quiet about this time. It was getting cooler, and I could retreat to my garret and indulge in my art frenzies again, had I chosen, but the desire even had failed me. I was disgusted with everything. I had no heart to revive my old pleasures or to encounter any of our young friends. I generally contrived to be out of the way when they call-

ed, though we did not so easily rid ourselves of Mr. Aymar as a guest. He came just as regularly after Flo's engagement was made known as before, kept up his quiet little way of referring to her in parish matters, and altogether set our foregone conclusions aside. He was just a friend and pastor—he had never intended to be anything more. I tried to avoid him when he came, but I was not always able to do so. Sometimes I would pretend that I had taken out my neglected canvas and was working diligently, much too diligently to be disturbed by a morning visitor; or I had a headache, or a new book to finish, or I was just going out for a walk—not to the cliff, I avoided that spot now—I should always be recalling the last time that I was there, I knew, when Flo had nearly broken my heart with her sad forebodings. I did not go near Matty Price or any of her uninteresting tribe, but sometimes Meg and I would take a quiet drive along the solitary country roads, and unburden our full hearts to each other, when mother and Flo were not by to see and hear.

It seemed to me that we were all playing a part, and the only one who was natural and at ease was Mr. Aymar. After a time, for some reason or other, he suddenly gave up his visits to us through the day, and happened in about tea time, or in the evening, when the family were all together, and the lamps lighted and the parlor windows were thrown open with the sweet, cool night air drifting in. He said it seemed homelike and natural to find us all here, and under those circumstances it was almost impossible for me to get away. I often asked myself why I should want to, and I never satisfactorily answered the question. It only made me conspicuous to frame an excuse to leave the room, and so after a little

I began to bear his quiet lectures, and his persuasive way of dropping bits of advice, with a little better grace than I had taken them formerly, though a spirit of perversity and wilfulness often led me to resist these influences and rebuff him to my heart's content.

Flo sometimes gravely wondered why I disliked the young assistant, and even Meg, who fancied she knew my innermost thoughts, took my dislike as real. It *was* real, as far as it went. Everything is real, for that matter, even to the froth on champagne or seltzer—only one wouldn't like to make a steady diet of it. My realities, I began to find out, were all froth. They bubbled up for a brief time, and made quite a fizz, but they were soon gone. I wondered sometimes if there were anything substantial left. Certainly I was making very little out of my life, and I felt a sort of disappointment and vexation with myself. I even longed to rub all out and begin again, as I used when a child to dispose of my sums in Long Division. In those days I generally rubbed them out with my tears. It really seemed to be the way in which I was forced to rub out other things, for I often cried passionately, and without any reason—as I afterward explained to Meg—without the slightest reason in life.

One night Mr. Aymar dropped in, as usual, a little before tea. He could not stay, he said ; he was going down to the beach ; old Mrs. Ross had been very ill again ; this time he feared she would die. She had missed Miss Flo so much ; and he had come to persuade one of the young ladies to visit her the following day, to read to her, and comfort her in her loneliness and pain. He asked Meg really, but he looked straight at me. Meg was willing to do anything. *Semper paratus* had been her watchword

ever since she was born, but unfortunately she had made an engagement to go up to the city with Bella Desmond the next day, to do some necessary shopping, and it could not very well be deferred.

‘But I will go the very next morning, Mr. Aymar,’ she said quickly, ‘and do all that I can for her.’

‘I might drive Flo down,’ said Neal from mother’s side, where he had stationed himself to wind a huge ball of yarn, ‘but she couldn’t stay very long. I don’t think she is able to take up that sort of thing yet.’

‘It would do me good,’ said Flo appealingly.

‘Yes, for a little while, but not for one of your old fashioned, lengthy visitations; you know I can’t allow anything of the kind, and you mustn’t ask it, Aymar.’

‘I don’t,’ returned he. ‘I don’t think it advisable for Miss Flo to see her in her present weak state. The Doctor thinks she can only live a few days longer.’

And then he left Meg’s side and said, as he stooped over to look at the book I had laid aside, ‘I have never asked a favor of you yet, Miss Barbara, and I want to break through established rules and begin with one to-night.’

‘Very well,’ I said, ‘ask away. I am all attention.’

‘I will tell you presently,’ he replied, and then he took out his visiting list and began to look it over with Flo, asking her advice in sundry matters, while I slipped up to the open window waiting for an opportune moment to get away unobserved, and avoid Mr. Aymar’s request. I had a conviction at once of what it would be. He had never asked anything but disagreeable things of me since I had known him—as if life were to be made up of hair shirts, red hot gridirons, and peas in one’s shoes. When he shook hands with mother, and the family all rose, I

stepped softly out on the piazza and went around to the porch at the back of the house. I stood there completely hidden by the vines, listening for the firm light tread to die away, when to my surprise it came nearer, and Mr. Aymar in another instant walked up the steps.

'Thank you,' he said with the utmost effrontery, when he saw me poised irresolutely on the top stair, 'I had much rather see you alone than make my request before them all.'

'I didn't come here for that,' I retorted indignantly. 'I was going to run away from you altogether. I think—I think—you have misunderstood me entirely,' I ended loftily.

'Don't let us disagree,' he said, putting out his hand. 'We always do, I believe. Let to-night be an exception. I am so interested in this poor, lonely, old woman. I want some one to help me, and you, with your energy, are the one above all others. Miss Barbara, won't you go with me in the morning?'

'To see old Mother Ross?' I said with a laugh. 'Why, Mr. Aymar, I haven't recovered from the effect of my visit to Matty Price yet. What can you see that is interesting in those horrid women! No, I wouldn't go for the world.'

'But your duty—do you never think of that?' he asked earnestly.

'It isn't my duty,' I interposed, 'to visit a parcel of wretched poor. I have duties at home—'

'Undoubtedly. Go to please me, then.'

'I have never pleased you yet in anything that I have done. I couldn't venture a beginning at this late day.'

'It is never too late—while we have life,' he said slowly, 'and the bravest and truest thing that a man or a

woman can do, is to be strong to please God and to do His will. It isn't that I think visiting the poor the one and only duty of life, but it makes a beginning. It goes on to better things generally. And it is beautiful, this blessedness that reaches us through other lives; and all the little paths and byways that lead into this blessedness, begin with Christ's own words: "Inasmuch as ye did it unto the least of these My brethren ye did it unto Me."

'But Mr. Aymar,' I said, instantly sobered by his earnestness, and yet unwilling to concede a point to him, 'there are so many others in the church who are better fitted to perform such duties, who are truly good and earnest, who enjoy charities and revel in sacrifices and good deeds. Why don't you go to them and leave me—in peace,' I added, after a momentary hesitation over the word. 'I like to go on in my own way—small and selfish, I acknowledge, but there is something absorbing about it when one once begins, and I want to be let alone,' I ended irresolutely.

He stood still a moment, then said with something like timidity, 'The true Shepherd didn't go after the ninety and nine that were safe—'

'Thank you,' I answered aimlessly. 'You make assurance doubly sure that one day I shall be brought into the fold.'

'Don't speak lightly of it. It is all so real and so awful to me. Every life has its to-morrow as well as to-day. I only pray that God may make your careless words true. I can leave you in His care,' and then he said good-night, lifted his hat and was gone.

When Meg came up to bed an hour later, she found me apparently asleep, and the next morning she was up

and away when I was really sleeping. It was a beautiful morning, and Neal and Flo went off for a ride, while I ran up to my studio and diligently applied myself to work. But some way I didn't take hold of it with the old zest, and Mr. Aymar's grave words kept coming back to me again and again, 'Every life has its to-morrow as well as to-day.' I wished before the day was over, that I had not only consented to visit Mother Ross, but the whole tribe of young and old along the beach, if by so doing it would have made me any more contented and at ease. Finally, after tea, when Neal and Flo were lost to everything in the world but themselves, and mother and father had taken Bess and driven off to the depot for Meg, I slipped out of the house, and took the shortest way across the meadows down to the beach. I had a small bottle of wine in my pocket and a few light biscuits in a napkin. I hadn't the faintest idea what to take to sick people, but I knew instinctively that wine was a very good thing, and I felt I was armed and equipped. As for my patient I had never seen her, but happily I was not unfamiliar with the surroundings, and knew almost every cottager's name along the shore. I am sure that I had heard enough of them all to go directly to any spot within two miles of Cloverly. Mother Ross' was the very abode of desolation I thought, when I reached it. I knocked rather timidly, but no one came. I knocked again more boldly, then raised the latch and softly pushed open the door.

'May I come in?' I asked, then peered around in the gathering gloom to see some signs of life, but the room was empty. It opened however into another one, the door of which was ajar. I tapped softly, then went in. The one window was open and the last rays of the setting

sun lit up the dingy walls and showed me the low bed on which lay a pale, haggard figure—a woman, wasted by age and sickness, a face on which, even to my inexperienced eye, death was written plainly. Scant gray hairs were scattered loosely over her temples, her bony hands were folded across her bosom, and she was breathing heavily, with half-closed eyes, that seemed to see me and yet were vacant in their gaze.

‘Is there anything I can do for you?’ I asked softly, bending over her.

‘You can read me the chapter now,’ she answered feebly without looking up. ‘I can hear it better. The wine did me good.’

Evidently she took me for one of her friends who had been sitting with her. But the chapter—it must be from the Bible, I thought. I took my bottle softly from my pocket and put it on the table by the bed, together with the biscuits, then looked around and saw a large, old-fashioned, much worn Bible, on the top of the cupboard. I hastened to get it down, and while the last rays of the sun lit up the room with a glory and splendor almost like that of which I was reading, I took up that beautiful description of the new city coming down from God out of heaven, adorned as a bride for her husband. I loved the chapter. It was beautiful to read anywhere, but it never seemed more perfect and comforting than it did here by the bedside of one who must shortly open her eyes in a Paradise almost as fair as that which St. John saw in his heavenly vision. I think if I were sick, and in pain, and very near death, that chapter would reconcile me to all the hardships and sorrows of a life that was almost ended. How strange it would seem to look back on the years? How little and mean, life and all its belongings

would appear? How contemptible and of little worth it seemed, even to me, as I read of those who had come up out of great tribulation—those whose tears were forever wiped away—for there should be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, nor any more pain.

I sat by the bed, in a low, wooden chair, reading on and on, while through the open window came that whispering murmur of the sea as it gently washed the shore, and it seemed almost as if I were in another world, quite removed and far away from the work-a-day life around us. I read until the sunset faded, and the poor sick creature sank into an uneasy sleep, breathing heavily and with difficulty.

To me it was a strange vigil. I watched the last rays of sunlight die out, giving place to soft purple shadows, and still the woman slept, while outside the low whisperings of the water mingled with those other mysterious sounds of night and nature, while death behind it all was brooding among the shadows. Presently she stirred, opened her eyes, and gazed feebly around. I poured a little of the wine into a tumbler and put a spoonful of it to her lips now and again. She took it eagerly, looking at me all the time with inquiring eyes.

‘Yer not Miss Flo,’ at last she said with a feeble smile.

‘No, I’m not so experienced about a sick bed. I’m her sister, you know.’

‘Yer never been here afore,’ she whispered.

‘No, I didn’t know that I could be of any use. I wish I had come—but I’ll do the best I can now. Have you been long ill?’

‘Aye, it’s been a weary, long time. I couldn’t count the days.’

'And are you here alone most of the time?'

'Never alone—never alone. There's One by me most a' the time—One who knew well what suffering and loneliness, and hunger meant. Aye, it's a small thing for me to lie here in this poor little room, when my King does not disdain to come down an' take up His abode wi' me. My King an' my Lord! I shall see Him soon now. I shall see Him in His glory.'

'But does no one take care of you through the day and the nights?' I asked in surprise.

'Aye, they're a comin' and goin' most o' the time,—an' the doctor he comes, an' the minister,—not the old one,—he's a very old man, and a'most as near the kingdom as I am. I mind me well when he was young and thought nothin' a steppin' over to see me and mine,—but they're all gone, and we're a goin'.' It's a woesome world,—the one I'm goin' to is better, far better. Yes, the new minister's here every day. He brought me the wine. I thought it was him when yer spoke first. I must ha' fell asleep. O but he's my comfort, he's my comfort.'

Mr. Aymar! yes, it was he no doubt for whom Mrs. Ross mistook me. O how glad, how glad I was, that he had gone before I came! But if there were comfort in knowing that he was not here, there was none in the reflection that night was coming on, and surely I could not go and leave the poor soul alone. She talked drowsily, now and again taking a spoonful of wine, and then dropping off into sleep. Presently she waked and said softly, with her eyes closed, 'Won't you pray with me once more before yer go?'

Evidently she had forgotten that I was a stranger, she might even have thought I was the minister,—she had

taken me for him several times. I dared not refuse, and yet I trembled as I knelt by the bed, and opening her Prayer Book, I read one of those comforting prayers for the sick and dying, while her skinny, feeble hand, rested on mine. It was so nearly dark that I could scarcely see the words, yet I seemed to understand intuitively what they were. I forgot my pretty pink lawn, as I knelt on the poor bare floor. I forgot everything but the thought that I was daring to pray at the bedside of the aged saint who was so near her journey's end. I put my whole heart into the petition. God knows I was praying more for myself than for the dying soul, who needed His help less than I in my youth and strength.

When I had finished she was breathing heavily again, but another voice said Amen,—a voice that I knew,—infinitely soft and tender, but choked now as if it struggled against some deep feeling. I rose quickly and saw Mr. Aymar standing at the foot of the bed, his head bowed between his hands, and his whole attitude showing that he too had heard the prayer. I felt the hot blood rush into my face, but I leaned forward and said in so low a tone that the sleeping woman might not be disturbed, 'Have you come to stay? If so I will go home now,—it is getting late.'

He did not answer, he seemed hardly to hear me, but he was looking me through and through with an expression of intense yearning on his face. Not until I repeated my question did he speak, and then it was not an answer.

'O Barbara!' he said under his breath, 'why won't you always let me see you as you are? Why do you hide your heart from me in this way?'

'It would be an uninteresting study,' I answered al-

most flippantly, 'scarcely worth your trouble. I am going now, Mr. Aymar. Good-night.'

'Not alone? You surely will let me go with you?'

'It is not dark yet, and I am used to walking about here until very late,—no, you must stay with the poor old woman. It seems to be the chief aim of your existence to minister to such wants. I am glad that I happened in to relieve you for a moment.'

'Did you not come here expressly to see her, then?'

'Me? what an idea! I don't like that style of visiting, you know well enough, but I am not sorry that I happened in just when I did. If I can do anything more, I shall be very glad,' I said, half repenting when I saw the grave, troubled look, in his face again. I tied on my hat and stepped lightly across the room, he following me to the door.

'Why do you delight in torturing me, Barbara?' he began, laying his hand on my arm. 'Why can we never understand each other. I would almost give my life if I could think you were really the woman whom I saw to-night kneeling by that poor soul's side, and praying with such fervor. Why are you so different when you are with me, Barbara?'

'Thank you for calling me Barbara,' I said, dropping him a profound courtesy; 'that makes three times in the course of the last five minutes! I don't think I was ever so honored before in the whole course of our acquaintance. And now, good-night again.'

I was ashamed of myself before I had gone half way down the slope. I turned, with the idea of going back and asking him to forgive my thoughtlessness and rudeness; then resolutely went on when I saw that the cot-

tage door was shut. He had gone back to stay with the dying woman.

How little and mean all my life and all my acts seemed when I thought of what he was doing every day. No, Mr. Aymar could not but despise me after this, and I went home and crept guiltily to bed, feeling as if I had been doing something I ought not to have done.

Meg said the next day to mother that she believed I worried more than any one about Flo. I had seemed out of tune for more than a week.

Yes, that was the very word. Why the world itself seemed out of tune lately, and why should not I?



CHAPTER XV.

GOING AWAY.

‘News, news!’ shouted Meg, running up stairs one morning after a visit to the Desmonds.

We were sitting with mother in her large, square, best room, over the parlor, across the hall from ours. She had taken the largest room, because, as she said, it wasn’t a supposable thing that a woman with six children could indulge in the luxury of an apartment all to herself, so she had really provided accommodation for eight. There was an old-fashioned lounge on which father took his morning nap, with a newspaper dropped over his eyes. It never made the slightest difference if we talked all together or were unnaturally quiet, his nap seemed to go on all the same. And there were comfortable easy chairs, and a rocker, in which Meg generally was swinging back and forth, and a sewing machine—beside, there was a cushion, a real mother’s cushion it was, with pins of every size to accommodate us. Mother said we never left her anything but crooked ones, and used to threaten locking it up, but she never did. Then there was her capacious workbasket, which seemed to us more like a representation of the goddess Plenty, than the graceful figure usually employed to denote that respectable individual. It was always full to overflowing with scissors, spools of cotton, and gay-colored silks, and two or three odd thimbles, with a wax heart and strawberry dangling from the handles. Ever since we had been old enough to flourish a needle and thread, that basket held as many allurements out to us as an open polar sea to an explorer.

There was no telling what undiscovered wonders awaited us there, though we had continued our researches from babyhood up to the present time.

On this particular morning, mother and I were busy at the machine, one basting, the other sewing, while Flo trifled over some delicate ruffling, and even Bess was learning very soberly to 'lay gathers' and take care of her cat and two kittens at the same time. Bob had brought up a broken bat and was tying twine around the handle when Meg rushed in, startling us with her cry of news.

'It must be something of importance,' I said, 'for you've dashed up stairs leaving Dolly out in the sun with the reins dragging on the walk. She'll step over to our flower bed and make no end of a row.'

'O no she won't,' cried Meg subsiding into a rocker and throwing off hat and gloves. 'Nat is going to drive around to the barn—that is, if he recovers from the shock I've given him—for it's such a piece of news! guess, girls, all of you—and you too, mother—guess away, quick.'

'O the Shah is coming to visit Mrs. Desmond,' I said, 'or perhaps His Imperial Highness the Czar of all the Russias is there already. Nothing stuns one that comes from that quarter.'

'But this will,' said Meg decidedly. 'Mr. Aymar is going away.'

'Going away!' and mother and Flo echoed my 'going away,' and then we all sat and looked at each other as if our little particular world had suddenly come to an end, and we were waiting to see what would happen next.

'He was here night before last, and he never hinted such a thing,' said mother.

'And how can the church let him go?' asked Flo. 'We

may as well give up, for we can never get another Mr. Aymar.'

And then I said 'Going away?' this time interrogatively.

'Yes,' said Meg, 'going to Germany.'

'To Germany?'

'Why, what an absurd echo you are, Bab—yes, going to Germany—it's all the fashion now-a-days. People will speak of crossing the ferry next, when they go. It isn't anything—not like a trip to the centre of the earth and home by the nearest volcano. I dare say we'll all go ourselves, when we can *sprachen Sie Deutsch* a little better.'

'But why does Mr. Aymar go so suddenly?'

'His mother is very ill, and she has been ordered to try the waters at Ems. He's an only son, you know, and his mother is a widow. They will go to the South of France for the Winter months, but the rest of the time will be spent at Ems.'

'The rest of the time?' I echoed. 'Pray, how long is he to stay? Does he give up his position here?'

'Entirely,' said Meg. 'He goes for a year-and-a-half, perhaps two years, and Mr. and Mrs. Leighton feel as if they cannot part with him. Mr. Leighton said he was willing to give up and have him made rector at once if only he would stay. And the parish is doing so well—everything in such fine working order—why, do you know, Mrs. Desmond actually cried when she told me. I found Netta Homans there when I went in, and the whole party looked as if they had been to a funeral. I declare it was quite sepulchral. And I feel about as badly myself, though Mr. Aymar isn't the only good clergyman left in the world, I hope. And then he promises to come back—though of course he never will, with the prestige

of European travel about him and two years of experience and growth. No! we may as well give him up. We have lost our Joss. "Little children, keep yourselves from idols." That's a good text for the next new comer to preach from.'

'When will he go?' said mother speaking first.

'That's the very worst part of it. Right off. He will preach his last sermon next Sunday, and leave the following morning. Bella told me the moment that he received the news he began to pay his farewell visits along the shore. He will say good-bye to everybody, but it can only be a hasty word to each one.'

'I'm awful sorry,' said Bess, dropping her work in her lap, and shedding two or three childish tears on the kitten's head. 'I thought he'd stay here and marry sister Flo, and then she could visit the poor all the time, and it would be so beautiful.'

A faint blush stole into Flo's face, when I inquired 'How many do you suppose Flo would like to marry? I'm sure I think she ought to be quite content with Neal Huntington. I certainly think she showed good taste in selecting him and leaving the priest out in the cold.'

'How can you talk so, Barbara,' remonstrated Flo. 'You know Mr. Aymer never thought of such a thing as marrying me or any one else. He is as devoted to his Church as any of the primitive Christians, and I fully believe he approves of the celibacy of the clergy. Think of the work he has begun here. And I don't believe he cares for anything else.'

'Well, he ought not to,' I argued, 'that's his business. But ministers, even the most devoted, sometimes marry. I've heard of such events at rare intervals in my life. It wouldn't have been at all strange or unlikely if he had liked

you, but it would have been very absurd for you to have thrown yourself away on him. It would have spoiled the very brightest romance that Meg and I ever put together—wouldn't it, Meg?—and I'm not sorry he is going. The adulation that he receives, is enough to turn a wiser man's head. I hope the next one we get will have a wife and six children.'

'So we can love the Gospel for the Gospel's sake, I suppose,' said Meg. 'Well, it is a trial of one's principles to have a man like Mr. Aymer placed over one. One is sometimes puzzled to know whether she loves religion for the preacher's sake or the Lord's. It's just the very idea Netta Homans started to-day. She said she had been in a trance, as it were, ever since Mr. Aymer came. She didn't know whether she were better or not—she only knew she wanted to be, and she wondered if the feeling would last if Mr. Leighton droned the law out to her instead of Mr. Aymer.'

'If he ever comes back and happens to bring a wife with him, she'll be able to tell,' said Bob, leaning on his bat contemplatively. 'I'm sorry he's going, though.'

'But sister Barbara don't care a bit,' whimpered Bess, cuddling her kittens and wiping her eyes.

'Bab's a woman,' said Bob sententiously, 'a very young one, and that's the reason she tries to deal in contrarities. Mother, I wonder if you were ever like the young girls now-a-days: they think they know more than any one ever knew before.'

'I suppose I was like the rest of the world,' said mother, basting her seam and smiling quietly. 'I don't feel very unlike the rest of womankind, now.'

'But you are, you are!—you know, girls, she isn't a bit like Mrs. Desmond, for instance.'

‘No,’ said mother, ‘I never saw the day when I could be so agreeable. Mrs. Desmond is a very cultivated lady.’

‘Cultivated!’ I cried with infinite scorn. ‘I don’t think its right to name you two in the same breath. Your little lady isms are so different from the claptrap simplicity and enthusiasm of Mrs. Desmond. I wish people could be *themselves*, and what God and nature intended them to be. A woman seems weak just because she don’t dare act out her true nature.’

‘A woman’s greatest strength is her weakness,’ said Bob dogmatically. ‘That remark isn’t original, girls, as you might suppose. Somebody a good deal wiser than I ever hope to be, said it, and you know it is true, Bab, although you are always clamoring about her rights. Her rights indeed! All the rights that she ought to look for or claim, are those of home—loving her husband and caring for her children.’

‘There you are right, Bob,’ said mother. ‘I think I am acting out my full nature here, with my husband and children. The sphere of home is quite large enough for me, my dears.’

‘What do girls of Bab’s tender years know about that sphere or any other,’ continued Bob, provokingly. ‘When they rave about high social and intellectual development, it only means fol-de-rol and fashion. It’s fashionable to talk about development and progress—not one in a thousand knows what it means. Modern brains are not like the old-fashioned ones, mother. There’s an entire difference in the cerebral structure now-a-days. Bab thinks you are circumscribed and cramped, when you are expanding every day, you dear little mother. As if your moral and intellectual nature would suffer, because you are quietly making a beautiful home for us all, and try-

ing to lead us up to heaven the old, simple way. If you only gave "conversations" and "readings," and had a literary lion or two at a big crush ball, and if you took all the money that you give to the poor and bought gew-gaws, and if you could clasp your ringed fingers and talk about "God leadings," and "instincts," and "evolution," and "affinity," as glibly as you talk over your household matters, why Bab would be set up for life and fancy we were all on the high road to bliss.'

'Hear! hear!' said Meg laughing and clapping her hands.

'I should think you would be ashamed of yourself, Bob Fox,' I exclaimed indignantly. 'I don't want mother to do anything of the kind. I like her just as she is, and I wouldn't change her for the world; but if we had money we would have position, and people would crowd about her just as they do at Mrs. Desmonds, and every one would see just how superior she really is; and I do think, Bob—you may laugh just as much as you like, a woman that has money will be accounted brilliant and wise if she be a fool—she can even commit improprieties and be thought only eccentric and original, while those who haven't money, and are sometimes clever enough to set up for wits and philosophers, if they only had the chance, are obliged to fold their hands and make a very effective background. So I do think that women, and young girls too, are so circumscribed and hedged in, that they seldom if ever give their powers full scope.'

'You do look very like one who has allowed herself to be hedged in by the proprieties of life,' laughed Meg.

'Dear me!' I said. 'If you tied up a puppy from the time that it opened its eyes, it wouldn't dream of going beyond the length of its rope.'

‘Wouldn’t it ’ roared Bob. ‘It would nearly wriggle its blessed young neck off as soon as it was old enough to prance around the full length of the halter, and if it didn’t hang itself with it, would sit down and gnaw it off. I know all about puppies—you can’t tell me—and women *are* like them, Bab, that’s a fact.’

Somehow the laugh was always turned on me. It wouldn’t do for me to wriggle my neck off to get rid of the rope; the only way was to sit down patiently and gnaw it off, as Bob had suggested.

Privately, to this my chronicle, let me confess it, no matter how much of a woman I tried to be, I always turned out the same silly girl, Bab Fox. After all, one can’t change their nature as one would their gown—if only one could, I know I would come out in a spotless white cambric every day—every day of my life.



CHAPTER XVI.

GOOD BYE.

Mr. Aymar did not come up to see us all of that week. I heard of him every day, going about from house to house, beginning with the poor people and fishermen, and saying good-bye to each one as kindly and tenderly as if he had been born and brought up among them. There was a general lamentation throughout the parish, and the people, as well as Mr. Leighton, were all asking what shall we do now ?

I had not seen the young clergyman to speak to him, since I had parted from him at Mrs. Ross' door. Mother said once that it seemed strange that he had not been near us in such a long time—more than a week—when he was usually here every other night, but Flo said she had met him when riding out with Neal, and he had told her how busy he was, also that he was reserving his last evening for us. But Sunday came around, and we saw nothing of him until we went to church and heard his farewell sermon. He looked pale and worn, as indeed there was reason he should, with his three services and Sunday-school, beside all the work that he had done in the past week. And there was old Mrs. Ross' funeral, at which I dared not present myself, and ever so many baptisms ; for every mother felt, just at the last moment, that no one but Mr. Aymar could perform that ceremony, for which he had been trying to prepare them from the time of his coming.

Yes, he looked pale and worn, and he felt keenly this first parting from his people. There was scarcely a dry

eye in the church when the benediction was pronounced, and the porch was quite crowded with those who lingered to shake hands once more. We did not wait to take him up to the house, and had tea without him, although Neal said he was coming.

Toward dusk, as I sat on a bench under one of the wide-spreading maple trees, reading, I heard the well known footsteps coming up the walk. I did not know whether to go and meet him in the parlor with the others, or stay out there and read my book. What could I say to him? We had never been able to get on together, and it would ill become me to profess regret—particularly before all the family, when I had so repeatedly declared that I would be glad if he went away. No, on the whole I thought it safer to go on with my story, though it was so dark I could scarcely see. For one thing, he would never know that I had heard him go up the walk.

I sat there alone, it seemed an interminable time, pretending to read, and trying to delude myself into the belief that the book was interesting, when I heard Bob from the porch calling 'Barbara, Barbara.' There was no use in saying that I could not hear that vigorous young voice all over the farm. I got up slowly, made a speaking trumpet out of my hands, and shouted back 'here' with all my might, as I crossed the lawn. They were all out on the piazza together, shaking hands and saying good-bye to Mr. Aymar. When he saw me he touched his hat as he ran down the steps, and came down to meet me alone. I stood on the gravelled path waiting for him to come up, thinking how delightful it was not to have Bob and Meg listening to hear what I should say. I had an innate horror of compromising myself in any way, and yet, while I stood there that moment alone, I made

up my mind to part from the young clergyman pleasantly and utterly ignore our former differences. I was ashamed to have him carry away his previous opinion of me—beside, if we were ever to meet again, it would be so excessively awkward. He came toward me, holding out his hand and saying something about being glad not to miss seeing me, and, by one impulse, we kept on walking toward the gate, though slowly, after the first greetings were exchanged. He held out his arm and I took it, with a sort of surprise at myself, for the unlooked for position of friendliness that it gave us. I think for a moment he hardly knew what to say, so there was an awkward pause, which he broke rather suddenly with

‘Miss Barbara, I am glad to have you a little while to myself, to-night. I have not seen you for a whole week, and you know I am going away. You won’t quarrel with me this last night?’

‘If you put it to me in that way, I shall most certainly say no,’ I laughed. ‘We’ll bury the hatchet, right here under this tree, and I promise not to dig it up—that is—not in a long, long time. I can’t say how long, for you know my unfortunate proclivities. But then, you may never come back.’

‘Yes,’ he said quickly, ‘I think I shall return if my life is spared. It would add another pang to the parting if I felt it was to be forever. I don’t want my people to forget me, and—perhaps I ought not to say it—but I don’t want them to be so thoroughly satisfied with the one who takes my place that they will not be glad to welcome me back.’

‘There is no danger of that,’ I replied, ‘judging from present appearances.’ He shook his head.

‘I should love to think so, but friendship seldom sur-

vives a long absence. I shall go on deluding myself with the hope, however, until I see you all again.'

'And when will that be?'

'In a year—perhaps a year-and-a-half—God willing.'

'Mr. Aymar,' I said suddenly. 'I don't mean to make any late in the day professions to you—I hate such things—but I just want to say that though your little lectures—yes, you have lectured me, you know you have—and your sermons, your example, and all that sort of thing, haven't made me any better, you have still given me the impulse to long for better things. And perhaps, when you come back, you will not find me the intolerable child that I have been all along. No, don't say a word, please; don't think I am asking your pardon,' and I gave a short laugh, 'or making valiant promises. I won't do either. It isn't my fashion. I only follow your own suggestions—just a glimmer as it were.'

He took no unfair advantage of my half-way apology, although involuntarily he pressed my hand that laid upon his arm a little closer to his side.

'You make me almost happy,' he said, softly, 'if it were a possible thing to find any happiness in this going away. It all seems so sudden and sad to me—my mother's long continued illness, and my determination to go abroad with her. But there have been so many pleasant assurances of friendship given, and so much interest and positive regret expressed, that it has stirred my heart strangely. And to-night you have added to my happiness, how much, you can never know.'

'Why, because I promise like a child who is tired of being bad, "never to do so any more"? I'm glad if its any comfort to you. It isn't to me. I've done nothing but make rules and break them ever since I was old

enough to remember, so it don't do to promise too much. I've been so foolish—it is rather an unusual thing for me to confess it, but I had just as soon do it to-night; I feel in the true spirit of confession—foolish and wasteful, throwing away all my chances of good, and spoiling other people's too, I fancy. Some day I am going to try if I can walk backward and pick it all up.'

'Better press on before,' said Mr. Aymar. 'You have all the rest of your life before you, and heaven, and God. He can go back and blot out all the lost opportunities. It won't do for us to retrace our steps in order to find them. That's the comfort that we rest in when we say we believe in the forgiveness of sins.'

'But if they are not positive sins,' I said, 'just little ignorances, or carelessness, sins of omission or commission, what are we to do then? I have such a disagreeable remembrance of those words "I would thou wert either cold or hot," and I suppose you will tell me in this progressive age, even ignorance is a sin.'

'Wilful ignorance,' he replied gravely. 'There is One who came into the world and bore all the pain and the sorrow of it, just that we might lean upon Him and receive His strength—that He might teach us how to live,—that He might take away our blindness and give us sight. It is a matter of such simple faith and trust. It isn't a thing that we can put on or off as we would a garment, when a suitable occasion offers, or at times, to please ourselves. We must give ourselves up into His care and grow. Think of the lilies of the field—how they are clothed with purity and beauty, hidden away out of sight among the green leaves, and yet covered with such glory, that even a king in his costly raiment is not likened to them. And it is so simple—to grow and blossom,

and to leave God to take care of the rest. After all our strivings, we can come to nothing nobler or truer. When it is Spring again, Miss Barbara, you must go out into the fields and search for the lilies. They will teach you many things.'

'But the love and the growth isn't for everybody,' I argued feebly. 'There are saints and sinners—and there always will be—wheat and tares, sheep and goats. It isn't a pleasant thought, but you know it is true.'

'And yet the message is to all, "Come unto Me all ye that are weary and are heavy laden."'

'But I don't feel "heavy laden,"' I said; 'there's the trouble.'

'I beg your pardon,' he answered quickly; 'that is not true, and you have no right to think it or say it. You have at times felt yourself in sore need and extremity. You would never have asked me the questions that you have, if you had not passed through such times of doubt and bewilderment, and longing for rest. "Thou oughtest especially to humble thyself, when thou feelest inwardly little or no devotion; and yet not to be too much dejected, nor to grieve inordinately. God often giveth in one short moment that which He for a long time hath denied; He giveth sometimes in the end that which in the beginning of thy prayer He deferred to grant." Those are good, true words, that were uttered so long ago, Miss Barbara.'

'Where do you find them?' I asked, as I saw him looking at me wistfully and eagerly in the dim light, as if he were longing to say a great deal more.

'In a little book that has been such a comfort to me. Miss Barbara, would you dislike it if I offered it to you? not as a souvenir, or anything that could be called a gift,

but as something that has helped me so much—and it may help you? You give me courage to believe that all you want is a helping hand.'

He took from his side pocket a little red lined book, with brown covers, on which I could see, in the twilight, was stamped a small gilt cross. 'It is my Thomas à Kempis,' he said. 'You won't care because it is nearly worn out and defaced with marks, will you? You won't think it impertinent on my part to offer it to you?'

'I will thank you very much instead,' I said, taking the book and then seating myself on a bench under one of the trees.

He surely did not expect me to walk with him any farther than the gate, I said to myself, but still he lingered, walking slowly up and down before me, with one hand thrust in his tightly buttoned black coat.

'I hardly know how to express myself, Miss Barbara,' he said. 'I fear that I am but a blunderer when I want to speak the clearest; but you will at least remember all my desires and prayers for you—when you read this book. I hope you will not forget me. If I live I shall come back. It is not like a parting really—don't let us make it so—only a good-bye, and a certainty that if God spares our lives we may meet again.'

He seemed so unusually agitated that I looked up at him with amazement, and then I laughed and gave him my hand.

'Good-bye, then. Meg says it is a mere crossing the ferry—we shall not feel you are so very far away after all. And remember that I haven't made any very strong promises of reform. It won't do to expect too much, you know.'

He held my hand in his while I was talking, standing

irresolutely a moment, then said suddenly, 'Good-bye, and God bless and keep you,—won't you say the same to me? You can afford to be generous just at the last, and part with me as a friend.'

'God bless and keep you,' I said, looking up at him in surprise. 'I am sorry you are going away, for you don't want to go, and it makes it all the harder for you. Good-bye.'

He bent over me an instant, touched my forehead with his lips, and before I could say a word, dropped my hands and disappeared, leaving me alone under the trees with crimson cheeks, feeling that it was all—even to his going away—a dream.

When I went back to the house I became vaguely aware of some excitement there. Neal was walking up and down the parlor, and it was mother, not Flo, whose arm was about him.

'What upon earth—' I began, and then stood still.

'Flo is not well,' mother said in an agitated way. 'She has overtaxed her strength to-day, just as I thought she would. You know she would attend the three services, a thing she has not done since the Doctor forbade it, and she had a sudden attack of faintness that completely unmanned this poor boy. My dear, you want to go and see her, but you will make her ill if you are not more composed.'

She sat down on the sofa by him, taking his hand in hers, and I flew up stairs, forgetting everything else in my fear for Flo. Neal had carried her up in his arms and laid her upon the lounge in mother's room, and Meg was bathing her head, while Bess was standing in an awed, frightened way, behind her with a fan. She looked up when I came in, smiled and held out her hand.

'I think I was a little faint,' she said. 'I have tired myself to-day, but I couldn't bear to stay away on Mr. Aymer's last Sunday. It was undertaking too much, just as mother said. Where is Neal?'

'Down stairs with mother. He looks worse than you do now, Flo,' I said, kneeling down by her side and pressing her in my arms.

'Poor boy! Won't you tell him to come up and see me now; and, Barbara, tell him how well I feel,—that it was only fatigue. He thinks it is this trouble with my heart.'

'And don't you, Flo?' I whispered.

'I don't know, dear. I've sometimes been sorry that I talked to you and to Neal as I did that day. It makes his life a long agony.'

'And it does mine, too,' I whispered. 'And you must see how mother has changed. My heart aches for her when I see her watching you and yet trying to be so sweet and calm.'

'Never mind about it now—try and forget that we ever spoke of it. I dare say it is very unlikely. Kiss me, dear.'

She closed her eyes, and soon fell into a light slumber, while I sat looking at the white face with a sense of alarm and pity that I had never known before. And presently Neal came softly in with a pitiful smile, put on at the door as one would wear a mask. She opened her eyes as he bent over her, and held out her arms to him, and I felt, with a kind of half jealous agony, that she was pitying him and thinking more of his distress than ours, although she loved us all dearly—so dearly.

CHAPTER XVII.

INTO THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW.

Things don't come of themselves, any more than they come before we need them. And yet, we go on saying 'It happened so and so,' 'Wasn't it queer it happened so to me?' Mr. Aymar's coming to our little church, and establishing himself not only there but in the hearts of the people, was one of the happenings. I often wondered quietly to myself, if our parting under the trees that September night could be called by that name too; there was something so unlooked for and strange about it all. I, of all people in the world! the girl that he had looked on with more aversion and coolness than any one in the parish! But his good-bye, so tremulously grave and tender, staid by me for days and days afterward, and the more I thought of it the more subtile cheer and strength I found in it. His 'God bless and keep you' nestled down into my heart, under all the cares and anxieties that came to me—for I did have cares; and so did we all, as a family. Father and mother both wore anxious brows, and a new tone of tenderness was unconsciously taken toward Flo. The real stress and strain of this anxiety bore upon us heavily, although there was little said of it; but Flo saw, she noticed a great deal about this time.

As for me, everything seemed slipping away; and yet I had to follow the family example, and hide my feelings as best I could. But many and bitter were the tears that I shed when I was alone, with no one to see; there seemed to be so many things to cry about, and tears come so easily when there is a heart pressure. Beside, I began to

ask myself seriously the question of what life was really going to be, for me. I thought I knew pretty well already what it *wouldn't* be. I was not going to be beautiful, or accomplished, or even good. And I wanted so much to be all three. I wouldn't even be the artist that I had dreamed about being ever since I was old enough to dream. I could paint a tolerable picture, it is true—trees, and grass, and mountains, and a sky that I need not have labelled 'this is a sky,' as the artist did his pig—and yet it was only a tolerable picture after all. I came to the conclusion that I was only meant for mediocrity, for it was just so with everything that I undertook. Someone must fill up the chinks between the very bright people and the people who don't know anything at all. Perhaps it is just as well—only it comes hard on those who are born with longings. Meg said, when I confessed my despondency to her, that it was like a hummingbird trying to be an eagle, and forgetting there were lots of pretty birds between the two.

I do not know what I looked for. I cannot tell what I expected of life. I only knew, as the days went by, that it was all a disappointment to me, and I hated the middle places just as cordially as I had always hated being the middle child. I could not express, even to Meg, what I felt. I did not really know, myself. How can we be sure there are valleys and abysses until we go down into the depths and find out for ourselves, and how can we know anything about the mountains until we have gained the heights? I did not even know it was night until I began to feel dimly what the breaking of the morning might mean to me. There must be darkness, but there must always be light too. Mine came after a season, but the darkness staid with me a long time first.

Our pleasant evenings seemed ended. Neal monopolized Flo more and more, and was so utterly wretched, and so boyishly gay, by fits and starts, that there was no dependence to be placed upon his moods, and very little comfort to receive from him in any way. He went out with Flo every day for a ride, but sometimes she would insist upon taking up her old duties again, making Meg or me go with her. We could never bear to see her take her little packet of books, or her basket, and the tears would struggle up into my eyes when I heard her sweet voice calling for some of us to go with her. Could it be true that the voice was to be stilled soon, that the foot-falls would be echoless, except as they sounded to us out of the dreamy past?

We had a new clergyman too, in Mr. Aymar's place: a man from the East, a Mr. Price, with nothing distinctive about him but a shock of black hair and a pair of gold-rimmed glasses, behind which peered two kindly dark eyes. He was neither young nor old, neither stupid nor brilliant, but one of those unfortunate people who seem content to wheel into line in the *middle places*. Perhaps that was the reason that I fraternized with him; a thing that filled the whole family with astonishment, since as I could not tolerate Mr. Aymar, they took it for granted I was a sworn enemy to the whole profession. I don't think Mr. Price could ever have put the parish in such thorough working order as Mr. Aymar, but now that it was all done, perfectly systematized, and in good condition, he accepted that state of affairs and kept things in the old groove. After a little deliberation, I took a class in Sunday-school, put my name down on the list of district visitors, joined the parish aid, and coöperated with Meg and Flo in all the red flannel and mutton broth

concoctions that they chose to get up—‘To relieve Flo,’ I always said, when I was questioned; ‘she really wasn’t able to bear so much care.’ And every one believed it but Bob. He made interrogation points of his eyebrows, gave a long whistle, and asked me if that was the penance the young priest imposed upon me when he went away.

Bob could be very disagreeable at times, and ask the most annoying questions, as every one knew. It really wasn’t worth while to mind half the things he said; and yet, I did.

Early in October there came lovely days, days with all the beauty of the spent Summer distilled into them, golden, perfect days, when one feels glad and happy to live, when one has longings and yearnings, desires to be lifted up into the greater beauty and perfectness that lie beyond. At such times I longed to be religious, and live nearer to God. It seemed so easy—so easy when I was with Flo. For I was with her a great deal now, even more than with Meg, who in her strong, capable way, was busy with mother nearly all the time, helping with the Fall sewing and other household matters. We had been making Matty Price’s fatherless baby a set of new short clothes, to take his first walking lessons in, and Flo and I started out to take them to her. Neal had gone on a fishing expedition with some of the craft on the beach, and she was quite sure that she could walk all of the way without being tired. Mother finally consented to our going, and after dinner we made up our package and started.

It was one of my favorite golden days. Not a cloud to be seen anywhere, but a soft misty glory resting upon everything. There were a few dry leaves under foot

and gorgeous colors flung on every tree, but it seemed Summer all the same. We walked along slowly, with linked arms, down the garden path and across the meadows back of the house, saying very little to each other, until suddenly I burst out with 'I wonder if anybody ever felt thoroughly satisfied with life—with one's own life, I mean, Flo? I think perhaps you may, and father and mother, and Nat and Meg—it wouldn't do to count on any other member of the family. And I know Neal isn't satisfied, even though he has you. He wants something more than that, and so do I. Do you suppose there ever was another such contradiction in life as I am? Do tell me what to do. I'm so restless and tired and full of longings. For one thing I want to get rid of Barbara Fox. I'd like to creep out of myself, as a snake wriggles out of its skin, and leave it behind me. I don't think I'd take up anything new, but I'd just like to go back and feel as I did when I was a little girl, and mother used to gather us about her on Sunday evenings, in the twilight, and hear us sing our hymns, and then cuddle us up in her arms and tell Bible stories. How sweet and real and beautiful it seemed then, and I feel sometimes as if I had walked such a long, long distance away from it all. I wish I could go back and love it as I did then.'

'That's the beauty of it, dear—to go back and be little children. It is just what the Bible tells us to do. "Except ye be converted, and become as little children,"—there's the beauty and simplicity of the whole thing. We are not told to do much—only so little--'

'And you think I'm always asking for Abana and Pharpar. Well, I don't know but it is so. Flo, I wish you'd teach me.'

'I teach you? Why Barbara dear, I'm only learning

myself. I should never feel like teaching when I have the lesson before me yet to learn.'

'Well, show me your lesson, then,' I said impatiently; 'let me see it with your eyes, once. I've looked long enough for it with my own, and I don't see that I'm any better for the looking.'

'It's a lesson of love—I think, Barbara,' she said slowly. 'If I ever felt any doubt of it I would only have to say over the words "For God so loved the world,"—I have to stop right there: the *world*, not part of it, but the whole, you and me—I am sure I cannot tell just how the love is balanced. I only know the source from whence it flows—from Him who is the very essence of love, to us, and back to Him from us again—a steady, tideless stream; and then the giving and the taking is all so blended together that I don't know how to separate one from the other—and I don't believe He cares to have me divide it. I like to take it just as it comes—full and free; and I want to love Him most, and first of all, because He first loved me.'

'I know the words,' I said, 'I've always known them, but I don't feel as you do about the peace and the rest. You are not strong—see how you are panting now—you are weak and tired, and yet there is a something in your face that rests one to look at. Flo, the love makes you really happy.'

'Yes,' she said softly. 'God has been so *good* to me.'

'But I can't think of His *goodness*—I think of my *sins*.'

'Perhaps I ought to think of mine oftener,' she said, a grave awed look coming into her eyes. 'But when I think of the Sacrifice once paid for sin, then I am content to leave it all to Him. I don't pretend to understand everything; and I wouldn't try, if I were you. It will be

quite enough to take in the love and the forgiveness. Above all, I wouldn't let the things you don't understand perplex you about those you do. It's a miserable way to go through life—stopping to pick up mysteries along the way. Beside, Barbara dear, if we look straight ahead and keep our eyes fixed above, we won't see or know anything about the troubles that lie under our feet.'

She looked up as she spoke to the cliff, under which we were that moment passing. 'Do you know, dear, I should like to go up to my favorite old place once more—that is, before the Winter comes,' she added quickly, interpreting my look of pain. 'I have not been there since we had that long, pleasant talk.'

'Pleasant? O Flo!'

'But it was to me, dear. It rested me so to be understood. Yes, it was pleasant, and I want to go up there again. Besides the talking at the cottage will tire me more than the walk up. I will tell you what to do. Take the package down to Matty Price and then come up to me. It will be a good chance to rest.'

'It is a good idea. I will go, of course; and it will take me a much shorter time than if you went along. But don't go all the way up.'

'O yes; to my old seat. It is as warm as Summer to-day.'

'Very well; then lean on me, and take it slowly.'

We took the long way around instead of climbing up the rocks, stopping now and again to rest and take views, and then going back to our little, speculative, religious talk, that Flo always liked to enter into when we were alone. When we reached the top, the entrance of the long shaded walk, she would not let me go any further with her.

‘Go on down to the cottage now,’ she said, ‘and I will stop here and rest. I shall feel quite strong for the walk home. And try on the little dress, Barbara, and see if it will do. You need not tell Matty that I came so near. She may feel hurt. Good-bye.’

She turned away from me and walked toward the cliff, while I went down, only stopping once to turn around and look at her as she walked under the arching trees, her long gray dress sweeping over the grass, her hands dropped by her side and her head slightly bent, as if she were indeed walking up the great aisle of a Cathedral, and felt an invisible Presence near. As I paused that instant, she came to the turn, looked back, waved her hand, called ‘Come up soon,’ and wrapping her light shawl about her, sat down at the foot of the cedar tree, while I scrambled down the rocks on the other side and gained the beach.

I found Matty sitting on the doorstep, in the sun, with her sewing on her lap and her baby tied in a low chair by her side, playing with some bright colored yarn. Matty and I had become great friends since Mr. Aymer’s departure, and the baby seemed to know instinctively that I always had something for him, for he held up his fat hands, laughing and crowing loudly, as I unfolded the white dress with the gay chintz flowers dotting it, and the crimson flannel sack that Flo had scalloped. Matty’s sorrowful face grew bright as I gave her Flo’s message. She was to bring the baby to church the next Sunday morning, for Baptism. ‘And I am to be his god-mother, you understand, Matty.’

‘Yes, Miss,’ responded Matty; ‘but I wish I’d ha’ had it done afore Mr. Aymer went away. I’m kind o’ shy of

that Mr. Price and his gold glasses, and I'm afraid the baby'll cry.'

'The baby wont do anything of the kind,' said I. 'He'll be on his best behavior, see if he isn't. And let him wear his nice long white frock just once more before you put on these short clothes.'

'He'll kick powerful in it, I'm afraid. He hates anything about his feet.'

'O no ; don't stuff such ideas into his head. He looks uncommonly wise, Matty, as if he understood all about it. And Mr. Price will be here to see you, to-morrow. Make him hold the baby a little, just to get used to him.'

'Law, Miss !' said Matty, 'I'd be scairt to death to ask him. Now if it was Mr. Aymar he'd take him up so kind o' easy and gentle like he'd never care nothing about the water. He had such a winnin' sort a way with him. He wanted me to have it done right off, you know, and I wish now I had. But I didn't think of nothin' then but my poor Tom down in the bottom of the sea yonder. Them was hard days, Miss, but somehow the Lord seemed to lead me right out of it. I'd ha' grieved myself to death if it hadn't been for the minister, then. And now I feel so kind o' strange, and half afraid of Mr. Price.'

'O now that's too bad, Matty, and he is so good.'

'Not like Mr. Aymar, Miss. I wouldn't ha' had to ask him to make friends with baby. But there now—that's a fact—we never had to ask nothin' of him. He allers knew before the askin'. Pears to me there never was such another man.'

'That's very evident,' I said laughing ; 'but I think I like Mr. Price.'

I tossed up the baby, settled him in his chair with his snarl of red yarn, said good-bye to Matty, and hurried back to Flo. I saw her long before I could speak to her, sitting just as I had left her, with her hands dropped carelessly in her lap.

‘Sitting here still?’ I called out as I drew near. ‘But you never wearied of the view. I hurried just as fast as I could, and I’m tired as I can be.’

Still she did not stir.

‘Flo,’ I said, approaching nearer, ‘Flo, you had better g’t up. You will take cold if you fall asleep here, you careless girl.’

Somehow the silence was so unbroken, it was appalling. Not a leaf stirred, or a sound of anything was heard but the wash of the waves below, and my voice seemed all the louder and more heartless in its jesting raillery, because I received no answer.

For Flo had not moved, and her hands, dropped listlessly in her lap, looked whiter and more slender than ever on her dark dress. I stood looking a moment down upon her, with an awful shuddering fear creeping over me, it was so still and lonely out there on the cliff. ‘I had always a horror of being alone,’ I said to myself with a subtile feeling of loneliness, even with Flo sitting there so quietly.

‘Flo!’ I called, ‘you must not sleep. Wake up, dear, wake up!’

Still no answer; not a movement, not a sound, except the low dreary wash of the waves below.

I came up to her softly, with a vague sense of coming anguish. She leaned against the trunk of the old cedar, her eyes turned seaward with a dull heavy stare, and just at that moment—as it had once before when we were

sitting there and Flo had told me the one secret of her life—out flashed a white sail, like a beckoning hand from the mystery of sea and sky, and the same old thought came back to me with added pain, What if she were to follow?

I leaned forward, touching her shoulder. 'Flo! Flo!' I called in agony, 'don't sit so still. Speak to me! Do speak to me, once.'

I lifted her hands; they were cold and lifeless, and I let them drop back in her lap again with a wild scream for 'Mother! Meg!' knowing in my helplessness that they could not hear, and that even Flo had stolen away out of sound of my voice. Her gaze was fixed on what was now a mystery no longer. Everything must be plain and clear to those eyes of inquiry, while a sort of glad, new surprise, almost formed her lips into a smile.

I rushed to the edge of the cliff and gave one hurried glance around. The sound of voices and the careless laugh of a child floated up to me. Just below a boat had been drawn up on the sand, and bare-legged children clambered in and out, while two or three fishermen stood by, lifting out lines and fish. I knew the tall broad shouldered fellow with his hand upon the basket, and I called frantically 'Neal! O Neal! Come! come, help.'

He looked up, took off his cap, and waved it about his head as he sprang up the steps worn in the ledges of the rock.

It only seemed a moment—it was all so sudden, so soon over; and then I saw him kneeling on the grass with one of Flo's slender hands in his, and her beautiful head, like a drooped lily, resting on his shoulder.

‘My darling,’ he sobbed, ‘my darling! Gone like a dream.’

And then I knew for a certainty that Flo had passed over that dark river which she had never dreaded to cross, and was safe in the beautiful paradise of God.

Some of the fishermen, alarmed by my cry, had hurried up to us, and a woman and one or two children were with them. I did not know what they wanted, or what they were saying. I saw them dash water upon Flo’s face and hands, and then shake their heads and whisper to one another, and the woman threw her own black cloak about her, and Neal—Neal himself—and one of the fishermen helped to carry her across the fields, and down to the cottage, where mother sat waiting for her children. O what a coming home for us all!

I do not know how I ever reached it. It seemed to me that I must have walked there in a sort of stupefying trance, for I dimly remember somebody putting my hand through his arm, and holding me up, sometimes even guiding my steps—it was somebody strong and tender, but I never knew who it was. On the porch I met Meg, looking with surprise and wonder at me, as we came slowly up the steps. ‘O Meg,’ I said, and my voice sounded hollow and far away even to me, ‘O Meg, she will never, never wake up, I fear,’ and then I fell forward on the threshold and knew nothing more.



CHAPTER XVIII.

THE DARKNESS OF THE NIGHT.

Yes, it was all true. We were only five in number now. Flo had gone away from us all, gone just as quietly and peacefully as she had lived.

The doctor came in softly, and then went away again. Some one had summoned him, though why, we could not tell. She had been dead some time, he said, but it must have been without struggle or pain. Looking out at that shadowed mystery beyond the sea, the veil had been lifted, and the secrets of the world unfolded to her. Eternity with its measureless depths had begun.

Neal kept watch in the silent rooms below. The whole house was hushed—awed into silence. We spoke in whispers, as if our voices could have disturbed the beautiful presence, that made the whole house sacred; and mother, who should have been the one most unnerved, was almost as still and calm as Flo.

There, in the pleasant, sunny parlor, she lay dead. And all the bright sunshine was shut out with her. Cold, dark, silent. On the coffin and about the floor lay flowers, great starlike carnations, lilies and roses. The room was heavy with the dead sweetness. I stole in there once alone, only once. I wanted to see if it were real—if it could be Flo—or if it were all a bitter dream.

I stood by the coffin and looked down upon the statue there. Frozen into silence, dumb in its awful, imperturbable calm. Deaf ears, closed eyes, hands folded and resting now from their life work. This was not Flo.

O if she could speak, if she could tell what she had

seen in that one strange moment between the sleeping and the waking. She was changed now—had she changed there where she was tarrying? How was it now with her in that wider life, that perfect abiding in the unveiled glory? Was her love for us any the less since she had set out on that mysterious journey? or did she look back upon us pityingly, yearningly, longing to lift us up?

Still silence! silence with her, while I was weeping such bitter tears. How could she lie so grandly quiet when our hearts were breaking? Only a few hours before she had been speaking to me. She stood with a smile upon her lips in the broad sunlight, waving her hand, and saying 'Come up soon.' Was the sunlight any broader and fuller in that new country to which she had journeyed so swiftly? And shall I ever reach it, and see her again? Will that other world seem more familiar and dear since she is there? Is that where she would lead me now, by the remembrance of her sweet words of counsel?—into the very freshness of the day gleam, into the very joy of the morning, into the full glory of the sunlight, into the peace and hush of the perfect day? Perhaps it was Christ Himself leading us up to Him, through this woe. I tried to put out my hands in the darkness and place them in His, but I could not see—not till afterward, long afterward.

We put her room in order. The empty dresses were folded and laid away. And yet her real presence was still there. Everything was as she had left it,—the tiny blue vases on the mantle with a few bright colored leaves and a trailing fern vine around them, the fresh bouquet on the dressing-table, the work-stand drawn up beside the sewing chair in the pleasant window, looking out over the meadows and the sea, the basket with the

work left in it, orderly and neat, as if she had made it up to keep. On the table were her favorite books, her little inlaid writing-desk that Neal had given her, her Bible, the pretty, blue velvet Prayer Book with silver clasps, and the little marker with silver crosses between the leaves. Was it to show us her last reading? I opened to the page and saw 'Behold, I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump, for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.' What a flash of blinding glory came to me in that one glimpse of resurrection. It was so strange I had never comprehended the words before.

After this, as the days went on, I began to feel I should not always be blind; one day my eyes might be touched, and I too should see, as I had never seen before! Would the brightness be too great for me to bear?

Bess would not sleep alone in the pretty room that we dusted carefully every day, and kept as dainty and bright as in Flo's lifetime. We had a small bed put up for her with us, but we still kept the doors open between. Often, at night, I lay with my eyes wide open, looking through the space, and seeing the stars glimmer beyond the window panes. Sometimes I watched the moon creep around and lie white and ghostlike on the floor, as if it were keeping guard around that empty bed. I often heard poor little Bess crying softly to herself, after the lights were out and the house was still, and I would clasp Meg closer in my arms, and press her cheek against mine, only to find it wet with tears; and then I knew that she too had been lying awake and thinking.

We cannot, any of us, rest as we used. And when the

night surges around us like a black, tangible cloud, I think of the horror and the darkness of the silent grave, where Flo is sleeping, with a shudder. It is so hard to think of our beautiful sister out in the night and the dew all alone. I stretch out my arms and embrace the awful void. The tears rain down my cheeks. And then I hear little Bess choking back her sobs and whispering 'Flo, I want you! I want you!' And I creep over into her bed and hush her to sleep, mingling my tears with hers, just as if the woe were fresh and new, and not growing older and older every day. And does Flo age with it too? I often ask myself the question—If I ever reach her and see her again, will she wear that same sweet smile of tender, patient trust, or will she be older, graver, and wiser, than when she went away? Does the life in that beautiful country always keep our loved ones for us immortally young? .

I had a dream of her, one night. I dreamed of such a beautiful country, and a wood through which I passed, full of cool shadows and glancing sunlight, and wild flowers growing on the mossy banks. Overhead the green boughs interlaced and arched, and within the cool shade walked Flo, all dressed in white, the long loose robe falling about her like a veil of mist, her golden hair banded above her forehead, just as she wore it in her lifetime. Her head was bent, her hands folded upon her bosom, the same sweet smile upon her face that I had seen there last, when she stood in the green aisles of our favorite walk and bade me 'Come up soon.' And when she saw me she smiled, and said 'Have you come to gather flowers with me, dear? See, I will pick them for you.' And she gathered great clusters of roses, the purest white, and trained them into a garland for my head, smiling

upon me all the time, but never saying another word. And my heart was so full of joy at seeing her again, that I too was dumb. But when the crown was woven and I tried to place it upon my head, the thorns pierced my hand so the blood came and dyed the pure white flowers a deep red ; and Flo stooped down and took my bleeding hands in hers, and cried 'O my darling ! my darling ! so Christ was wounded for us with thorns.'

And then I woke with a start and cry of fear, and the moonlight was streaming in all over the carpet in a broad circle of quivering light, and I was in my own bed, and the room was so still, save for Meg's low breathing, and I closed my eyes and fell asleep, with the words Flo had spoken to me in my dream, coming back to me again and again, 'O my darling ! my darling ! so Christ was wounded for us with thorns.'



CHAPTER XIX.

THE PROMISE OF THE DAWN.

It was a dull day in late Autumn when Neal Huntington came up to pay us a last visit and say good-bye.

The beautiful Summer had vanished; indeed, all beautiful things had seemingly been swept out of our lives since Flo had no longer a part in them here. The skies were leaden, the wind howled in dreary gusts, and the great waves dashed in upon the rocks with a hoarse cry that must have given many a woman on the beach a heart-ache. I had gone down there among the people, who now that Flo was gone, seemed very near to me. It was almost like a trust that she had left, and I took up the work right willingly, and found it not only a pleasure but a relief. It seemed to lift me for a time out of the heavy stupor of my grief. Matty Price and her baby boy had been, perhaps, the most interesting to me, of all the Church poor, and this particular morning I had been down taking care of the child, while she had gone up to Mrs. Desmonds for work. As I came back along the rough country road, I thought how different everything looked since I had taken a wider range of action. All unknown to myself, I had discovered a new meaning in life—people and things were not what I had thought them. The children in the mission school had taught me much. Indeed, I think I never understood before, the full meaning of the words ‘Except ye become as little children.’ With a memory of that text before me, I tried to study out their thoughts, hopes, plans, even their little sports and games, to get at the underlying princi-

ple of simple faith and trust. Such work grew after a time to be a kind of comfort to me. I did not dawdle over my impossible pictures as much as formerly; only at rare intervals did I have leisure for painting at all, there was so much to be done, and there were so few hands. I understood now what it was to go in unto the harvest and find the laborers few. Many a time Mr. Price grew discouraged. I often wondered why Mr. Aymar had not become utterly so.

I walked briskly along in the fresh strong air, turning over these new thoughts in my mind, when I saw Neal Huntington coming down the path leading from the house. He stopped at the sound of my rapid footsteps, waited until I came up, and then drawing my hand within his arm, walked with me toward the house.

Neal had never been away from the village since Flo's death, and was with us every day as constantly as if we were his sisters in reality. We held our sorrow in common and in silence, each bearing it bravely and still. I had not thought of his leaving us, and it gave me a rude shock when he began abruptly—

'I am going away. And I have been saying good-bye to them all. On such days as these, I feel as if life were not worth the keeping, and the sooner I get away the better. To look at the leaden sky and hear the roar of the waves, is enough to put a sane man in the asylum for life. So I am going away. Barbara, I shall not stay another day.'

'That is what a man can do so easily,' I said with a sharp pang; 'go away and forget. The hardest lot of all falls to us women, who stay at home and weep.'

'Barbara, you are cruel!' he said, turning his tear stained face for an instant to mine. 'Meg and Bess did

not part from me so, and your dear mother was more kind and tender than all.'

It had been a trial, then, to say good-bye to mother. He had been crying in spite of his manliness, for of this sorrow he had never been able to speak manfully.

'O forgive me, Neal,' I said repentantly. 'It is so hard for us to bear, and for the moment it seemed so easy for you to go away and get rid of it all. And every day we have to take up our work—work that she always helped us with—and sit over it, trying to chat as we used, and sing the familiar little tunes that we would hum over together; trying our best to count the weary days for less than they are, and never giving ourselves time to reckon up our cares. But you don't know—how should you?—how our hearts sicken under it all.' And my eyes were dry and tearless, while his were full of blinding tears.

'Not know?' he repeated after me in a choking voice, 'not know, when I loved her better than my own life? O Barbara! Barbara! next to the joy of heaven is the thought of meeting her again.'

'And you will see her just as she was when she was with us, Neal, won't you?' I asked with a sort of appealing agony, longing to know what his faith had done for him. 'Do you think that she will be changed? that she will be so beautiful that we will not know her, and so far away, and so much above us that she will not remember how she loved us here? O Neal, I wish we knew!'

'I think we may trust God for all that—can't we, dear?' he said. 'He wouldn't give us *almost* heaven here, if it wasn't to show us what it may be afterward.'

And yet all the time his eyes were dim with tears. I

looked at him with wistful envy. How was it that he and Flo could lay hold of such certainty of faith?—and should I ever learn the lesson too?

We walked slowly up to the house without another word. When we reached the piazza, he stopped.

‘I can’t go in again,’ he said; ‘it was hard enough to say good-bye once, without attempting it over again. You’ll all write to me, won’t you? And when it is Summer, I shall come again. Perhaps I can bear it better then. But I want to hear from you regularly; and you must tell me every little thing—I shall feel such an interest in your work, and the church, and school, and even in Bessie’s kittens. Your mother is going to write to me every month, but I want you girls to write between times. You won’t forget me?’

‘No, we will none of us forget you, Neal; you have made yourself already as dear as a brother. And I won’t forget what you have said to me, to-day—it will do me good to remember, and perhaps some time I shall think of Flo as you do. I am sure I am trying hard enough to understand.’

‘We are both learning lessons, Barbara,’ he said. ‘We are in the alphabet now, but it won’t do to stop short there. We have much to learn before we can have the comfort of the full reading. And now, good-bye, good-bye.’

He walked swiftly away without once turning to look back, and I opened the door and went in to all the warmth and brightness gathered in the snug parlor. In the wide chimney a ruddy fire leaped and blazed. Mother sat before it in her little rocker, her basket of work upon her lap, but her hands were idle, and her eyes were fixed upon the fire as if she were lost in thought. Perhaps it

had been a trial to her to say good-bye to Neal, but no one would ever know, and nothing ever *seemed* hard to her—we could only guess at it all. Meg was winding crimson worsted for the Doreas knitting, and Bess, with red eyes, was demurely dressing a large doll. The cat with her two kittens, now nearly as large as herself, was curled up on the old velvet rug, making the most of the warmth and the blaze.

I looked around with full eyes and a choking sensation in my throat.

Meg looked up and said 'Did you see Neal?' And I answered 'Yes; he walked part of the way home with me,' and then softly closed the door.

It seemed hard, but we were all—even to mother—trying to do without Flo, trying our very best to forget. Was it right? It makes one sad sometimes, to think that in this commonplace world there is so little time left for remembrance. Everything we love may die, but the machinery of life goes on just the same. We eat, we drink, we sleep, we fold our hands and pray, we ask to be resigned to God's will, and straightway take up our life as it dropped from our hands in the first shock of our woe. Is that what resignation means, or is it forgetfulness? And yet if we did not forget, how could we live? How could we bear the strain and weight of the anguish, if it were kept forever fresh and green? Yes, we were all forgetting—God graciously gave us power to do so. Mother and Meg had taken up their home duties again, Neal was going away, and even Bess was comforted with her doll and kittens. Sometimes her voice rung out in a burst of fresh, childish laughter, but she would check herself almost instantly and say 'O I forgot.' Then mother always smiled, patted her head, and

said 'Laugh on, little one. It is not good for the young to be sad, and our darling is happy—why should not we be happy too? God sends us blessings every day, but His greatest blessing, I think, is the healing and the peace that He gives when our hearts are nearly breaking.'

This was not forgetfulness. But all the same it was hard to-day to have Neal go away; to come home to the bright, cheery parlor, and see the work going on as it used and Flo not there—it was like *putting her away*; and yet how could she be away, really—except in a joy we could not fathom.

I went up to my own room and stood by the window looking out. It was well that the house was bright, for it was desolate enough without. The lawn and garden paths were strewn with dead and whirling leaves; only the dahlias and chrysanthemums held up their heads and bloomed, the gorgeous colors making all else seem even more desolate and dead. Down at the end of the lane, where a few short weeks before it had been a perfect bower of green, the trees tossed their bare branches in the wind, and under them I could see Neal, his head bent, his arms folded, as he hurried along the road, treading the dried leaves fiercely under foot, just as if he were treading out all the joys and hopes of a life that might have been so full.

Suddenly my mind went back to that other good-bye, uttered when those leaves were fresh and green, and the boughs bent down to hide us with their soft, cool shade. I went back to that time, straying idly and carelessly along through the lane to the gate, dropping on the low bench, looking not at him but at the sunset just fading away between the trees. Again I felt two hands laid upon my head, smoothing away the hair from my forehead,

and then a kiss, soft and tremulous as a woman's, lingered there. Again I heard the words 'God bless and keep you'; and I smiled to myself at the memory, wondering if it were a prayer; for if it were—true, earnest, heart-felt prayer—then had I cause to hope, for the Bible speaks of the prayers of a good man availing much. This one farewell, at least, ought to have made me happy.

He had given me at parting 'not a souvenir,' he said, but something that might help me very much—something that had comforted him in time of great despondency. And I had never once looked in it, or taken it up. I had thrown it into a drawer that night when I came home, and, I had to confess it to myself, I had never thought of it since.

I opened the drawer and took the little book up to the window. I sat down in the fading light and turned leaf after leaf. On the title-page was written in pencil '*A. S. Aymar, from his father,*' with a date of some years back. It must have been given to him in his school or college days, and it had been his constant companion since. Here and there some hand had traced lines in pencil against the verses, and one whole chapter was thus marked. I read with a strange sense of peace: 'It is good that we have sometimes troubles and crosses; for they often make a man enter into himself, and consider that he is here in banishment, and ought not to place his trust in any worldly thing.' . . . 'These things help often to the attaining of humility, and defend us from vain glory: for then we are inclined to seek God for our inward witness, when outwardly we be contemned by men, and when there is no credit given unto us.'

And I read not only that page, but one more, before the cold dull twilight deepened into night.

CHAPTER XX.

A CHAPTER OF LETTERS.

The days sped on, passing into weeks and months ; and before we were aware, Winter came closing in, and the snow lay in white drifts all over the country as far as the eye could reach.

We went back again into the old, quiet routine—not the routine of the pleasant Summer that had gone, but the dull round of a life that we had thought left behind. Everybody seemed to be away, for one thing. In the most unexpected manner Mrs. Desmond closed her house, took her two daughters and dashed off to Europe. ‘It was time that the girls saw something of the world,’ she explained in a breathless P. P. C. to mother. ‘The country was dull in the Winter, and what was it to go abroad, now-a-days ? Everybody went, and one really felt out of place in the world if one couldn’t talk of Paris, the Rhine, Rome, frescoes, paintings, antiques, and that sort of thing.’ And then, suddenly, she begged mother to let me go with the girls. ‘She would take the best of care of me, and what wouldn’t a glimpse of Old World art do for me. Would mother trust her ? Could she spare me ?’ I couldn’t but laugh at the high-handed audacity of the request, when she knew for a certainty that I hadn’t money enough to pay even for a soft plank in the steerage ; but mother smiled serenely, acknowledged that it would be delightful, and what she should most desire for me, but it was quite impossible to afford it ; and with protestations of regret and a hope

that we should meet again the following Summer, she bade us good-bye.

We were really sorry to lose the young ladies. They were bright and rather sensible—Meg and I often wondered how they could be—and with Mr. Aymar and Neal away, it was more than ever dull to us. When I look back upon that Winter, I remember nothing of more importance than our home-sewing, our Parish Aid, and Saturday Mission School ; the putting on of a gingham dress in the morning, and a plain black cashmere in the afternoon, with white ruffles at the throat and wrists, sitting quietly in mother's room or the parlor, with our sewing or embroidery, sometimes taking up my drawing—but my painting was put away, and for a season forgotten. In the long Winter evenings father or Nat would read to us as we worked together, and Mr. Homans and Mr. Price occasionally dropped in, the former with a new book or a freshly cut magazine, and the latter with a budget of parish plans to spread before us. It was a dull Winter ; but it couldn't be called lonely, for, as Flo once said, there were five of us left, and mother and father were always interested in our projects, and ready to help us, too. One afternoon in every week, Netta, Meg, and I, would work for the Parish Aid ; and after tea, Ned Homans would walk over for his sister, and finish out the evening with us ; or, if we were at Netta's, he invariably walked home with Meg. I always had to take up with Nat. And Mr. Homans was such a grave, middle aged gentleman, I often wondered what possible topic of interest he and our Meg could hold in common ; but whatever it might be, they managed to extract a good deal of quiet pleasure from it.

We heard from the Desmonds very often through Net-

ta, upon whom we now depended almost entirely for society. Mrs. Desmond was cantering through the world at a break-neck pace, determined to see everything in the shortest possible space of time, if one were to judge from the letters Netta read to me. They drifted over to us like leaves from the trees in Autumn. Just as we had begun to think of her *parlez-vous*ing glibly in France, she was possibly gliding along the Grand Canal in Venice, picnicing in the Tyrol, or dropping in upon an Austrian *Schutzenfest*. We heard of her in all possible and impossible places. Now that she had fairly started, it wasn't enough to be simply ubiquitous—if it wasn't wicked to say so, she was doing her best to be omnipresent. We should not have been surprised to hear that she had been trying elephant riding in India, or mounted on a camel, was enthusiastically picking her way over Sahara, with her gold rimmed eye-glasses nicely adjusted and the latest Parisian novelty upon her head.

'She had met such charming people,' she wrote; 'had formed such undying attachments, and yet, she assured Netta, she was wild to see the village people again, and go back to her active parish duties—and that reminded her she had seen Mr. Aymar. In the most unexpected manner she had stumbled in upon him, conducting the English Church services in an obscure German town. It was the sweetest bit of home that could possibly have been wafted to her; and he asked about every one—positively every one, my dear—even to that absurd Matty Pribe and Jimmy Van Dyke and his three tow-headed daughters; and he has grown so handsome, so eloquent—more like my ideal John than ever; but his mother—now really, my dear, I must whisper you a secret even at this distance—it isn't a case of *inherited* beauty, at least

the gift isn't *directly* from his mother, the most faded little specimen, dressed in rusty, sepulchral black, of a cut and fashion that might have answered very well at the obsequies of Cheops; but really, at a gathering of distinguished English and Americans, for the purpose of Morning Prayer, it was comical, you know, my love, positively comical. Even Edith smiled; and *that*, with Edith's sense of propriety, you will grant me, meant a *very* great deal. But then this poor little fragment of apparently a bygone age, lives, like her son, in a sort-of-above-the-world state; and how should she, poor dear, know anything of Worth or *Le bon Marché*?—besides, she is a great invalid, and Mr. Aymar just travels about with her from place to place. We met them again, weeks afterward, in the Valley of Gastein, trying the warm baths—those miraculous baths, my dear, of which, probably, you have read. I took one—only one—and all I can say is, I live to tell the tale.'

In the Spring another letter came. 'I'm so sorry, indeed I am, Netta, that I spoke so slightly of that faded little woman, Mrs. Aymar. She is gone now, poor thing, where it don't make any difference about the cut of her garments. I expect she was a sort of a saint, for she died in the most peaceful, lovely manner, at Rome, and her son left her there in the Protestant burial ground, just as she wished. There is the most exquisite stone-pine near her grave, and when I went there, just before I left, Mr. Aymar had planted white violets all over it. I am sure I am very sorry for him, though why he should be so broken-hearted about it, I can't imagine. She seemed a very *remote* little body to me; probably she once was interesting, and he might choose to remember—memory is such a very, very odd thing, you know. I

find the tears coming into my eyes, sometimes, when I think of my mother, although the dear old lady died when I was very young ; but I remember distinctly, she wore two little flat bunches of curls on each side of her head, with tortoise-shell combs—combs were all the style then—and she was very sweet and lovely—I sometimes think Edith resembles her—so good and religious, you know. You can't think how even here she finds out all the English chapels, and she is just as regular at the services as if she were at home—so nice of her, you know—and we do all we can to comfort Mr. Aymar. I can't but think our presence here was, on the whole, providential. We are his nearest, and indeed, we might say, his only friends—and one don't quite understand what that is, until one is in a strange land one's self, hearing a strange, uncouth language spoken. It seems so simple to speak English, and I think they *might* do it if they tried. But they don't try, my dear—there's the trouble—they don't make the slightest effort to learn. It seems just like *obstinacy*, sometimes. So I think our hearty, old-fashioned English "I'm so sorry for you," sounds sweeter than any amount of sympathy in those dreadful gutturals, that are dragged up from the depths of a kind heart, perhaps ; but I always feel as if that organ lay somewhere in the region of their boots—sympathy sounds such a *long way off*, Netta, my love. And Mr. Aymar is still with us, here at Rotterdam ; but we're going to take a run up to Norway and Sweden, and if nothing very new and attractive offers, we shall be at home before the Summer is over. I don't find anything better than Ocean County, over here, though I will privately whisper to you that some persons think New Jersey must be—well—very

queer! I have met all sorts of people abroad—black, white, red, and cream-colored; nice people, and common people, people from the ends of the earth, and people from the middle; but I haven't seen one from New Jersey yet. It may sound incredible, my love, but it is a positive fact, when I say we are from that State, they stare, and I can't help the feeling, that they are looking for barnacles, or some other dreadful thing; but I always write my name down resolutely on all the hotel books, no matter how hot and uncomfortable I feel while I am doing it, with a very plain, legible New Jersey after it, though I can't help feeling, when it's all done, that it's the U. S. A. that has saved me. I can't say how Mr. Aymar feels about it—he never tells; also, I don't know whether he will go on to Norway with us, or to London alone. He never mentions his plans, which is decidedly funny of him, for I tell him mine fifty times a day.'

This was only a portion of the letter that Netta sent us over to read. The rest was a sort of running commentary on all of the out-of-the-way and in-the-way places between Bavaria and the Hague. How we all shouted when Meg finished reading it, and how Bob cheered for Mrs. Desmond when she told of her plucky little encounters with the poor natives, who *would* thrust their execrable German and Dutch upon her. Anything more comical than Mrs. Desmond, with her set ideas and her phrase book, careering around the world, was difficult to imagine. It seemed a shame to laugh when the same letter told of poor Mr. Aymar's loss; but funerals and woe were so oddly mixed up with her mother's front hair, carnival festivities and custom-house wrangles, that we had to take the whole as one of Mrs. Desmond's *pot-pourris*, and let it

go. There were also kind messages to us, and a long, enthusiastic, but vague description of the paintings she had seen at the Pinakothek in Munich, which clause was inserted for my benefit, she said.

Bob volunteered the information 'that Mr. Aymar *would* go to Norway, also that any one with half an eye could predict that he would come home engaged to one of the daughters'; and father, who never gossips, laughed and said 'I think you are about right, Bob, my boy.' I do think this is a very peculiar world!

The Spring cheered us all wonderfully. The flowers budded in the garden beneath our windows, and in the trees, covered with drifting blossoms, the birds came back and built their nests. The striped squirrel nodded and winked his bright eyes at us from his favorite crotch in the big tree, and cracked nuts in our very faces with the utmost impunity. Evidently he had found us out, and liked us pretty well after a year's acquaintance. We had letters from Neal all the Winter most regularly. He had gone into the office of an old physician, a friend of his mother's, and was reading medicine with him. 'I am going into work and study with a will, now,' he wrote to Meg. 'I am tired and ashamed of my idle life, and when I get my profession, I'll come down and settle near you. A country practice will take all the old idleness out of me, and do me good, too. Meantime I am making arrangements to spend the whole Summer with you. I don't want to see any one but you girls—don't throw me over for the first new face that comes along; I belong to you now, don't ever give me up. The mother and Bess went,' he added confidently, 'but I've my doubts about Bab. She had freaky ways, and, now that Aymar's gone, I'm afraid she will turn around on me.

Caution her about it, Meg, and oh do be glad to see me when I come, for no one knows how much I need you all, or how much pain will be mixed with the pleasure of meeting.'

Meg read me the letter one beautiful day in May, and before June was well begun Neal was with us again ; not much changed as far as looks went, but more grave, earnest and thoughtful, than I had ever seen him before. Father and mother, I think, began to love him almost as much as they did Nat, and Bess positively spoiled him with her childish adulation. The two were always together, and I did not wonder that he petted and loved her, for she grew every day of her life more like Flo. She always had her quiet little ladyisms and repose of manner, and her hair was the same wavy gold, and her eyes just as serenely blue. Bess already was the beauty of the family, and in a furtive way was laying aside her doll and childish plays, and taking to reading and practising the piano, and putting on dainty airs of stately sobriety that were quite unusual.

As for Meg and me, we drifted off into parish work with great energy. Early in the Spring poor Mr. Leighton died very suddenly, and Mr. Price grew restless as the work increased. We had all begun to look upon him as settled in his position, and after Mr. Leighton's death, he was offered the rectorship, but to our surprise he refused. He preferred going to the city, and was even at that moment deliberating over a call he had received. He withheld his acceptance, however, until the year for which he came had expired, and meantime the parish was thrown into the utmost anxiety. Would Mr. Aymar come back now that his mother was gone? He had promised most earnestly to return whenever he was able,

and yet at that moment he was travelling about in Sweden and Norway, merely for pleasure, and forgetting us in our necessity. There was no reason now why he could not come, and worse than all, he did not even write. Evidently the old adage was true—‘out of sight, out of mind.’ Mr. Price said as much to me one day, and I could not deny it. We were all cruelly disappointed in Mr. Aymar.

A few days after our conversation Mr. Price sent in his resignation, to take effect the first of October, and now it only remained for the vestry to choose a suitable person in his stead. Now we needed Mrs. Desmond. With her energy and her long purse, what couldn’t she do for us, and why didn’t she hurry back? Bob gave it as his opinion that she wouldn’t stop until she had sung the Star Spangled Banner on the highest peak of Caucasus. It certainly began to look like it.

Meantime Netta, Meg and I kept the Mission School and Parish Aid alive, doing the work of six all through that Spring and Summer, and encouraging the poor people along the beach to believe that their school and extra service would not be given up, and that somebody quite as good as Mr. Aymar and Mr. Price would be provided, although it was almost a matter of faith with us. Mother once said something to me at this time, that sent the tears rushing up to my eyes, and me off to my own room with never a word to give her in reply. It was just a kiss upon my forehead and the words very tenderly spoken. ‘I can see how you are trying, my child—you must not think I have not noticed because I have said nothing—and it makes me very happy, very happy. You are taking Flo’s place, my darling; the work that she laid down you have taken up bravely.’

O as if this were possible !—possible with me ! But the love and the tenderness were almost more than I could bear.

A little while after this Netta had another letter, or rather rhapsody, from Norway. ‘They were having a perfect Summer, and possibly they might “do” the Nile before they returned—one might as well see it all, when one began’; but not a word of Mr. Aymar.

One day in mid-Summer Matty Price brought up her little boy to leave him with us, as was her custom, while she went on to one of the farmhouses to do a day’s washing. Baby Tom was always our guest on these occasions, and many a neat calico frock did Meg and I shape for him when we were alone. He was a bright, curly haired boy, quick to leap from signs into words, and he had become an especial pet of mine. Just before sunset I took him to the end of the lane to wait for his mother. We sat down on the bench by the gate, he with his lap full of flowers, which I was making up into a bouquet for him to take home. The air was cool and soft after the heat of the day; the sunshine lay in broad patches over the grass, and through the trees a bright ray fell directly on the child’s head. His hat was off, the lint-white curls tied back with a blue ribbon, his little feet were tucked under him like a miniature edition of a tailor, and his fat hands were buried in the flowers. Against the dark shadows of green, Tom’s baby face and golden hair stood out like a beautiful picture. ‘Mam—mam—mam,’ he shouted gleefully, clapping his hands, as a step sounded along the dusty road.

I heard the gate open, but I thought of course it was only Matty, and hurried to tie my bouquet, as I called out ‘I’ll have his flowers ready for him in a minute,

Matty. See how I've curled his hair and tied it with blue ribbon. Isn't it a pretty picture ?'

'It is indeed,' said a well known voice. 'I would never care to see a prettier.'

I turned quickly, my face flushing with surprise. It was Mr. Aymar ! The very last person on earth whom I expected to see !

'Miss Barbara, is it really you ? I thought I could not be mistaken,' he said, holding out both his hands.

In return for the warmth of his greeting I only gave him one of mine, having just sufficient presence of mind to stammer out something that might be construed into a welcome—'And what cloud did you drop from, and when did you land ?' I added.

'I came in a much more old fashioned way than riding on a cloud, Miss Barbara—in an old tub of a steamer that I thought never would land us safely in New York ; but it did, and here I am. I arrived about two hours ago, and only stopped to see Mrs. Leighton. I dashed in upon her, and nearly frightened her into hearing all that I had to say without the aid of her ear-trumpet, and then I came directly up here.'

'And the Desmonds ?' I inquired, 'where are they ?'

'Did you not know ?—we parted at Rotterdam. I thought Mrs. Desmond would have mentioned it in her letters. They went on to Norway, and I directly to London.'

I drew a long breath. 'Why didn't you write ?' I said. 'If you only could have known how much the Church needed you !'

'Because I wanted the pleasure of taking you all by surprise.'

'Well, you have succeeded, then,' I laughed. 'And

here is one of your parishioners to welcome you,' and I pointed to little Tom, who was gazing in round-eyed wonder upon the intruder.

'Ah!' and he patted the curly head. 'Whose little child is it, pray?'

'Why, Matty Price's boy—you surely remember her—and this is the baby that you had to go away and leave unbaptized. O you needn't look so sorry. It was done soon after Mr. Price came, and I stood for him. Think of that, will you! He is quite my boy now, I do assure you, and is fond of me, next to his mother only. You see I have come out in quite a different character since Mr. Price came.'

'I am glad that he came, then,' he said soberly.

For a moment there was silence, broken only by the hum and stir of insect life around us, and the low, far away, murmur of the sea.

'It is good to be at home again,' he said, 'and it doesn't look changed, though I shall find more than this little boys' growth to astonish me, I suppose. But for his presence here I should scarcely realize it was nearly a year since I bade you good-bye, in this very place—do you remember? Have you been sitting here ever since then?—or is it only a dream that so much has fallen between that time and this? You are not changed, and yet you are not the same Barbara that I left under the trees,' and then as his eyes roved over my face and fell upon my black dress, his voice took a softer tone. 'I have wanted to write and tell you how deeply I sympathized with you in your affliction—I was in Germany when I heard—but I did not dare intrude upon your grief. You must have known—you must have felt—that your loss was one that we all, as a Church and as friends, must

share. And yet words of sympathy seem so cold at such a time, that I have dreaded to utter them.'

'Thanks,' I said, the tears welling up into my eyes at the thought of Flo. 'It don't make much difference, I suppose—sympathy is such a stereotyped thing. When one loses the very idol of one's heart, it matters very little what the rest of the world have to say about it. I suppose I shock you. I always did, I believe; but I don't mean to be ungracious. I remember how you liked Flo, and what good friends you always were. You never quarrelled or found fault with her, as you did with me. No one ever found fault with Flo, not even when we were little children—and there always seemed to be something for children to quarrel about—but she always stood aloof from such things. She was never like any one else. Her life was too pure and beautiful for earth.'

'And so it was taken away—transplanted, as it were; lifted above all gross belongings, where it may be perfected day by day, growing brighter and fairer against the second coming of our Lord. Do you ever try to console yourself with that thought, when you feel the weight and the bitterness of the loss upon you?'

'I do try,' I said with a choking sensation in my throat, 'and I am consoled—sometimes, not always. Sometimes life seems all made up of hungry want, and waiting, and loneliness. I don't think I can tell you—and you can never know—quite what her death was to me.'

'Not know,' he echoed sadly, 'when I have just left my all in a foreign land? And you have others to love, Barbara! Death claimed my all; and yet I cannot call the blow a cruel one, it was dealt with so much tenderness and love.' And then we talked of his mother—of

the full, complete, and perfectly rounded Christian life, and Flo's just budding into promise. It seemed so easy to talk of her to him after that—to tell of her peaceful falling on sleep, to live over again all the beautiful acts of her life, her winning ways, her childlike faith and trust.

And while we talked the sun went down grandly into the sea, and little Tom watched the flickering shadows fall, leaning his curly head against my shoulder, listening to the strange, deep voice, with round bright eyes of wonder. And presently Matty came in at the gate, and stopped to shake hands with her dear Mr. Aymer come back again, and to add an embarrassed, incoherent welcome, that he liked, I could plainly see, for he bent down suddenly and left a kiss on the little boy's white forehead, as she was bearing him away in her arms.

And then we two were left alone under the tall trees, in the shadows and the silence.

'Will all my old parishioners give me the hearty welcome that this poor young woman gave me?' he asked rather suddenly. 'I cannot tell you how it touched me to find myself so well remembered. You must know now, for you are with them so much, she says.'

'I think they will,' I answered. 'I am sure that they have waited and longed for you with the utmost gratitude and kindness in their hearts. And there are all of our family yet to see, and mother and Meg sitting in the parlor in blissful unconsciousness of their distinguished guest. You must go up to the house at once and get a welcome there.'

'Not until I receive one from this little girl, first,' he said promptly. 'Barbara, tell me—I want to know, and I cannot wait—are you glad to see me? Are you glad

that I came back ? If you tell me to stay, I shall stay ; and if you tell me to go—O Barbara, I hardly care what becomes of me then ! ’

‘ I—I don’t want you to go,’ I stammered inaudibly—‘ that is—you needn’t go away—on my account.’

‘ Then—*on your account*,’—and this time he laughed—‘ may I stay ? ’



CHAPTER XXI.

NOT THE END, BUT THE BEGINNING.

Nearly a year after, we had a wedding in our little church, and everybody was there to see. It was quite an innovation upon established rules; for, before this, almost every one had been married at home, with only a few, select, invited guests, to behold the inevitable lace and orange blossoms.

The pleasant Summer time had come around again. The sky was as blue as the sea, and all the world looked fresh and fair as if decked expressly for a bridal. The chancel was full of flowers, and Mrs. Desmond was there, eyeing the effect with her gold glasses wavering doubtfully on the tip of her agitated nose; besides, she wore the most beautiful silk dress and lace bonnet that I had ever seen. And Edith, who had married abroad, was with her husband and mother in the front pew, the observed of all observers; for the bride, who should have been the prominent figure, was, to the great discontent of the crowd, dressed only in a plain, grey silk, with a jacket of the same, and just a suspicion of the orthodox bridal white, under the brim of her grey chip hat. And Bella Desmond, who had her old seat at the organ, played the most joyous wedding march, and the Sunday-school children, ranged in two long lines on either side of the middle aisle, threw flowers as Mrs. Desmond had instructed them to do, when the ceremony was ended.

Perhaps it was just like any other simple country wedding, and yet I enjoyed it rather more than anything of the kind that I had ever attended. That might have

been because I was the bride—those things sometimes make a difference ; beside it was our Church, our people, our Sunday-school children now. And yet there were tears in my eyes when I walked down the aisle, and I could not have seen my way clearly over the flower strewn-carpet, if it had not been for the arm on which I leaned—though I was so happy I could not tell why I should cry. And then we drove home, and for a brief hour received the congratulations of the parish.

‘Who would dream that I could shed tears at the loss of Barbara Fox to the world ?’ said I to Meg, as I turned from her to mother for a good-bye kiss.

‘Perhaps we shall find we all have gained something in Barbara Aymar,’ said father.

‘I have gained a brother,’ said Bess, holding up her face to him for a kiss, and then my husband helped me in the carriage and we drove away, looking back to wave our hands and catch a glimpse of Bob executing a pirouette, with the traditional shoe in his hand.

It all seemed like a dream—sometimes it seems so still. And my heart failed me when I thought of leaving home and my Meg—the better half of me, I always called her—and my dear, dear mother, and all ; and I found myself wondering how my husband’s people would like me, and what they would think of me, and if any one would ever love me for myself, or just because they all loved their dear young pastor. How could I ever tell ? for I knew there had been those in the parish who, when they first heard of our engagement, thought I was too young, too gay, a little too abrupt, freaky perhaps, and childish, to be a clergyman’s wife ; but father patted my head kindly and said ‘She will learn, this little girl of mine, she will learn a great many things by and bye. I can see she

has been learning very silently and quietly a great deal since we came down here to live.'

That was about as much encouragement as I wanted from father, who said so little usually, but who thought so much. And as for my husband, indeed I don't think I can ever tell, even to this chronicle, *what* he said, or what he keeps on saying every day; and when I think of him, I can smile and say over to myself softly that it seems more than ever like a dream.

Bob was the only one that tried to infuse a drop of bitterness in my full cup, when I told my incoherent tale to the family. 'He had no objection to Mr. Aymar; he was an awfully jolly fellow, he had no manner of doubt—when one found him out,' he said in his blunt, boyish fashion; 'but his name, that was more than even he could bear; and what would I do?' remembering my agonies in former days over my poor, ugly, diminutive, Bab Fox.

'Aymar is a good name,' I said hotly; 'better, far better than Fox.'

'But Mrs. Adoniram Sennacherib!—think of that, Bab. I don't believe even you can bear it, my poor girl. But you have our united sympathy—you can have any amount of that to fall back upon, you know. And I found it out so easy. His name was engraved on the handle of the umbrella that he left in the hall last night. I thought I should faint when I read it and recalled your delicate nerves, and for a minute I rashly contemplated playing the part of the Assyrian. I think any one of the family could have stood that blow better than you, Bab.'

'I do not believe it,' I said with emphasis, pretending to arrange my hair before the glass, but feeling my cheeks grow crimson every moment.

'It was a new hatchet,' said Bob reproachfully, 'and I

cut the tree, but I could not tell a lie. You will ask my forgiveness before night, Bab, in your new frame of mind. A year ago my life wouldn't have been safe, though.'

And he went off to tell Meg, singing over to himself,

'Things deteriorate in kind;
Lemons run to leaves and rind;
Meagre crops of figs and limes;
Shorter days and harder times.'

But that evening, when we were alone, I seized the opportunity to say to Mr. Aymar, as I opened my Thomas & Kempis, and turned the leaves carelessly, 'O by the way, you have never told me your name; the initials only are here. Is it a very dreadful one, that you have kept it to yourself all this time?'

He smiled as he said 'Nothing very bad, little one; not half as bad as it might be; still it is not a pretty name—Algernon Sidney. My mother always called me Algie when I was a boy, but I suppose you will think I have outgrown the abbreviation now, so call me anything you like, dear.'

'And I have been trying this whole afternoon to say "Mr., Sir, you, he," and sometimes "it." But I know one thing, I shall never call Bob "George Washington" after this,' I exclaimed with a real glow of gratitude to the faded little woman who had the grace not to go back into the antiquities for a name, as she had undoubtedly done for the fashion of her garments.

And so my very last burden rolled away. Perhaps it was silly, but I was so very, very glad! It would have been rather awkward to go through life making a personal pronoun of one's husband, after all.

Sometimes I wonder if my chronicle is ended, just because I am married. It seems as if life had only begun

when that came; though I used to think that a clergyman's life was the hardest in the world, always excepting the poor wife's. But then every one hasn't such a parish as we have, or—I may surely write it down here—such a husband as mine. Life is almost too new, and too perfect, even now, to be real. Instead of coming to the end, I shall look back upon it as a beginning.

After our marriage Mrs. Leighton went away to live with a daughter, and we moved into the pretty little rectory. Mother says it is a gem of a home. Mrs. Desmond and I, strange to relate, are the dearest friends. I found it impossible to resist her patronage and her good humor. Bob says she bought me, and, metaphorically, gagged me, and bound me over to keep the peace, but then Bob will never get over his unfortunate habit of speaking his mind plainly. At all events, I accepted in a perfect transport, the exquisite little copy of Carlo Dolci's Infant Jesus, that she brought me, from Italy! Moreover she gave the largest kind of a reception for us, and privately begged me to forget that she had ever said anything derogatory to the dignity of my mother-in-law. The poor soul! How could I help being a friend after *that*?

'I always adore my clergyman's wife,' she said to me, in a breathless parenthesis, 'but don't be one of the pokey kind, my dear; you know the look of them—always in washed out gray, with a long suffering expression of countenance, and a disposition to frown down innocent amusements. I can't but think it's owing in some way to the dress, my love; pray avoid neutral tints—I have a horror of them myself; and though I am disposed to be very religious, I must have my little parties, and croquet and music, and my short game of whist on a

Winter evening. I never could understand this being "in the world and yet not of the world," my love—do you know, confidentially, sometimes I fancy it must be a *conundrum* or a *fable*.'

Bella is still at home. She and Netta and Meg are great friends, and work wonders in the mission and Sunday-school. Edith went to live in the city, but in the Summer she comes back to her mother, and as for her husband, we all like him very much. Mr. Homans and Meg are very friendly and polite to each other, but there isn't the slightest prospect of her ever marrying. 'Bab, my dear,' she said to me one day, 'it did very well for you to go away and leave mother—you never amounted to much in the house, except in the way of a picture or two, and oil and turpentine over your best dresses, and on the carpet, to say nothing of your fatal habit of decorating your nose. We've had enough of love making and giving in marriage in this family for years to come. It is a mercy that no one wants me, for no family is complete without one orthodox old maid, to say the least. Beside, now that you are away, I am much too busy to be worried with nonsense and, as Mrs. Desmond would coherently observe, "all that sort of thing, you know, my love".'

And Neal came to live among us, just as he promised he would, with an M.D. affixed to his name. But he never married. When he is questioned he says he is waiting for Bess, and meantime Bess is very fond and proud of her dear brother Neal, and thinks there is no one in the whole country who is so wise a physician. And many others, particularly among the poor, think the same thing. But there is a shadow on his face sometimes, and I often think it will never go away.

And father and mother are the very happiest couple in

all the whole wide world, they say—with their dear Cloverly, all their own now, and Nat, and Meg, and Bob, and Bess around them.

And the world went on. People married and died, and new people rose up in their places, and yet we were left an unbroken family, save for that one sweet link that bound us all to heaven.

So there is nothing more left for me to tell. Nothing but to close up my little book and put it away. Nothing more to record but quiet years of happiness and undisturbed labor—a tideless stream of trust, and hope, and love. For there is sunshine in my heart now all the day long. God has been very good to me. He has led me out of the land of doubt, through the shadowed valley, up to the hills. All along the way did His hand guide me, though in my wilfulness and pride, I made the way very hard to myself for a time. For I wanted, and intended, to do such very great things—and I have done so little; now, in looking back, I can see that I have done so little. But I am beginning to learn that when I think I have done the most, then it is that I have done the least, that I am only the same wilful, headstrong Barbara after all.

But what are our lives but beginnings? and what is the world but a school of discipline? a place of trial, failure, and too often, utter defeat. But, thank God, one day there will be an end. One day we shall know and be known, 'when the morning breaks and the shadows flee away,' we shall have another joyful beginning—all together—in Our Father's House.

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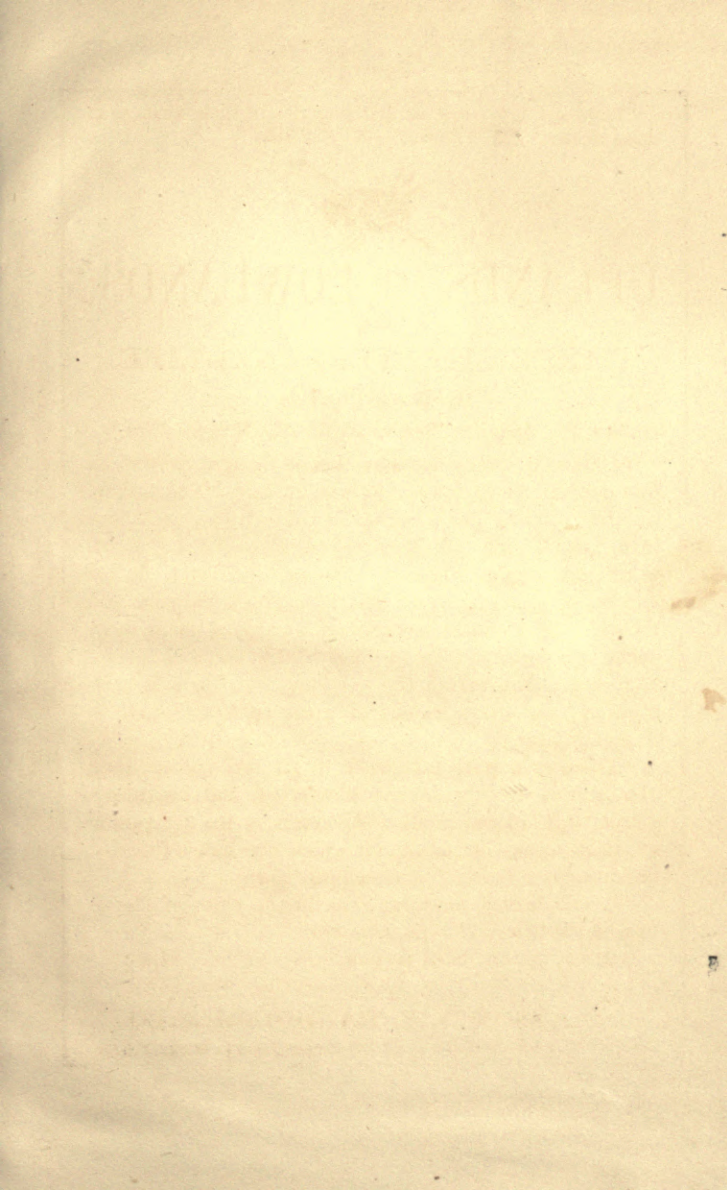
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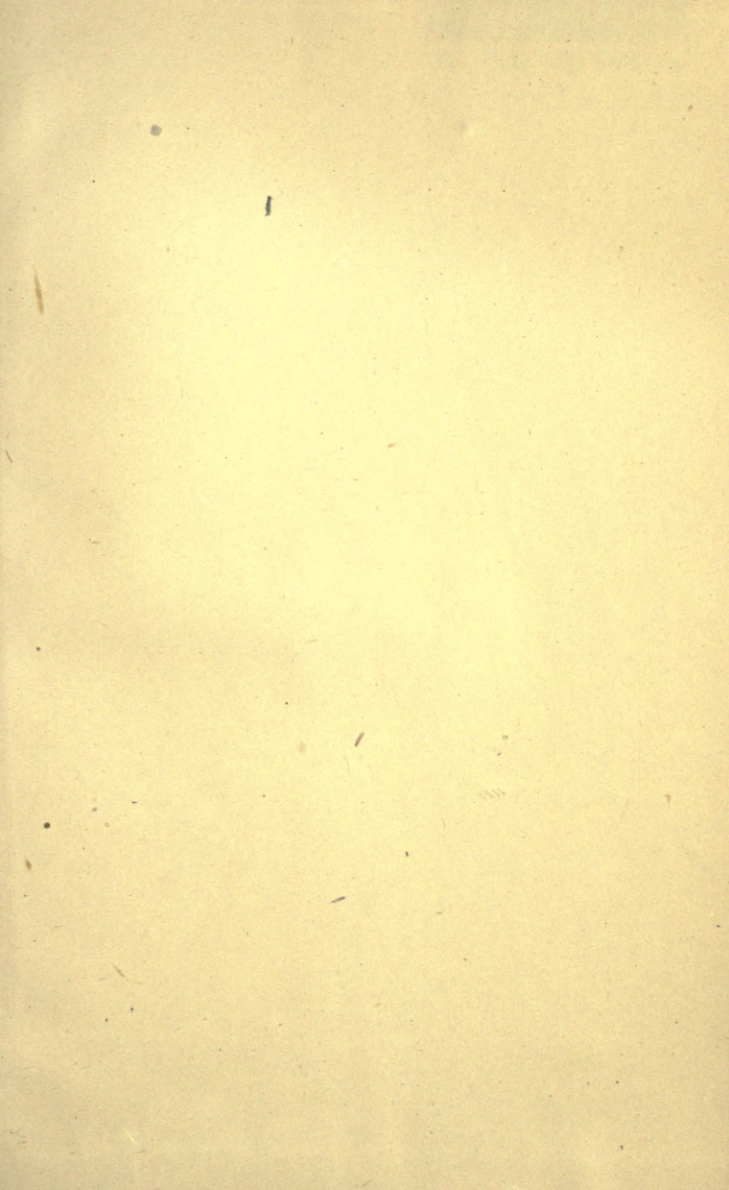
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